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# China

C H I N A T O U R I S M

## LEGENDS OF THE TAIHANG MOUNTAINS

CHASING THE FORESTRY TRAINS  
SLEIGH RIDE THROUGH A WINTER  
WONDERLAND

284

ISSN 1025-577X



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Hard cover HK\$150 HK\$120

### Focus on Yunnan

The mountainous wonderland of Yunnan enjoys a favourable warm climate year round. Its capital, Kunming, sitting alongside Yunnan's largest lake, Dianchi, has the honourable name of "Spring City". The province is full of natural wonders and cultural relics, such as the Stone Forests, the Shangri-La, and the ancient cities of Dali and Lijiang. With over 20 diverse ethnic groups making up about one-third of the population, opportunities abound for you to see their characteristic cultures and customs.



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### Focus on Fujian

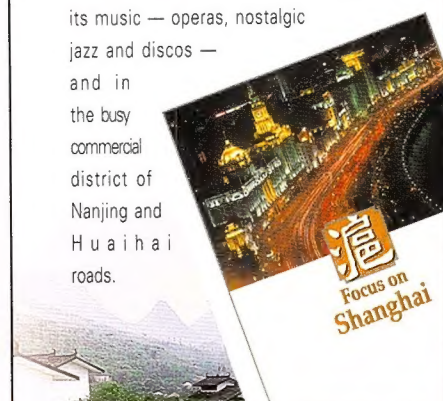
Situated on the southeast coast, Fujian Province overlooks Taiwan Island across the Taiwan Strait. Its mountainous landscape includes the Wuyi Mountain Scenic Area, one of the UN World Heritage sites in China. The province's zigzag coastlines, numerous beaches and charming seas offer spectacular scenic beauty as well as historical and cultural interest in such places as the Drumming Wave Islet in Xiamen and the Mazu Temple in Meizhou Island.



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### Focus on Shanghai

Shanghai, the largest metropolis in China, and formerly the Far East financial centre, has experienced dramatic development over the past century. The world-famous Bund along the Huangpu River shows you buildings of different historical periods and varied architectural styles, while skyscrapers are rising in the new area of Pudong. Shanghai's multiculturalism is seen in its music — operas, nostalgic jazz and discos — and in the busy commercial district of Nanjing and Huaihai roads.



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### Focus on Shaanxi

Shaanxi is the cradle of the Chinese civilisation and Xi'an was the capital of 13 dynasties. This has left Shaanxi a rich legacy of historical sites and cultural relics. In the provincial capital Xi'an, there is the fascinating terracotta army unearthed from the tomb of the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang; the tomb of Tang-dynasty Wu Zetian, China's first empress; and the stele forest. The province's beauty is capped with the sheer cliffs of Mount Huashan and the yellow earth of the Loess Plateau.



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### Focus on Guangdong

An important gateway into China, the fertile Pearl River Delta of the southern province of Guangdong fans out from Guangzhou to the South China Sea and borders Hong Kong and Macao. The province's natural scenic spots include the limestone pinnacles of Zhaoqing's Seven Star Crag, the red sandstone of Danxia Mountain, and the volcanic beauty of Xiqiao Mountain. The capital, Guangzhou, offers plenty of history in its museums, temples, mosques and old colonial buildings.



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### Focus on Guizhou

Guizhou is a land of splendid natural scenery. Its towering mountains and karst landforms team up with the gurgling rivers and magnificent waterfalls to form a wonderful work of Mother Nature. Huangguoshu Waterfalls and the limestone caves are the province's most frequented scenic spots. The 17 ethnic groups living in the picturesque province further colour the land with vivid customs and joyous festivals. It is its natural beauty and culture that make Guizhou a perfect travel destination.

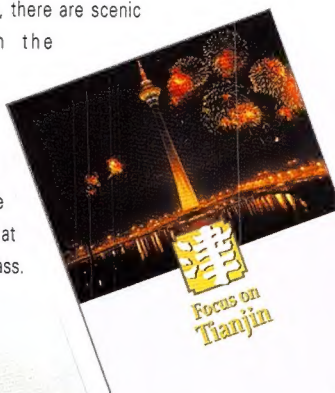




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## Focus on Tianjin

Tianjin, one of the four municipalities under direct Central Government administration, is an important industrial and commercial centre of China and the biggest port in the north. The history of the city can be found in its Ancient Culture Street, 100-year-old Western-style buildings, Opera Museum and Mazu Temple. Besides the TV Tower and the Haihe River in the city, there are scenic spots in the outskirts, including the Dule Temple and the Great Wall at Huangya Pass.



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## Focus on Xinjiang

On the vast land of Xinjiang in Northwest China, there are mountains, basins, deserts and lakes, which provide tourists with numerous attractions — ruins of ancient cities and tombs along the Silk Road; Turpan, an oasis in the desert; Kanas Lake, a gem imbedded in the Altay Mountains; Bayanbulak — the Swan Lake; and the world's second largest desert, the Taklimakan. The minority ethnic groups living in Xinjiang, such as the Uygur, Kazak, Mongolian, Uzbek, Tajik, Xibe, Kirgiz and Tatar, all have their own unique colourful culture.



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## Focus on Beijing

Beijing is a metropolis of everlasting charm. There are simply too many captivating things to see, to experience and to taste in this grand city with both old glamour and new mobility. There are historical sites such as the Palace Museum (the Forbidden City), the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace, and the Ming Tombs; there are also many scenic spots in its outskirts. Recently, tours have been organised for visitors to taste the real Beijing flavour of life — touring the small back lanes, having tea in a traditional-style teahouse and enjoying the Peking Opera.



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## Focus on Shanxi

Shanxi Province, one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilisation, has impressive ancient architecture and a wealth of well-preserved Buddhist temples, monasteries and grottoes. Among the most famous are the Yungang Grottoes containing some of China's oldest sculptures and Buddhist art, the Yongle Palace, the Jinci Temple, the Hanging Monastery built on a sheer cliff and the Wutai Mountain, one of China's most famous sacred Buddhist lands.



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## Focus on Guangxi

Unusual topography has endowed the province with numerous spectacular karst formations — limestone caves, pinnacles and rocks. The most famous and enchanting scenic spot is Guilin, and the most travelled route, on the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo. The coastal city of Beihai has the country's largest beach, the Silver Beach. Other attractions include the varied traditional customs of ethnic minorities, the Sino-Vietnamese border area, and the mysterious Huashan cliff paintings.



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**mar/apr**  
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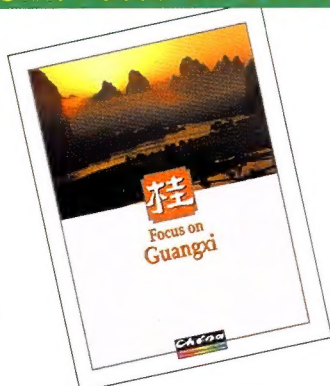
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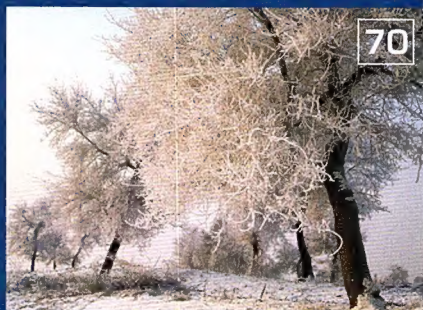


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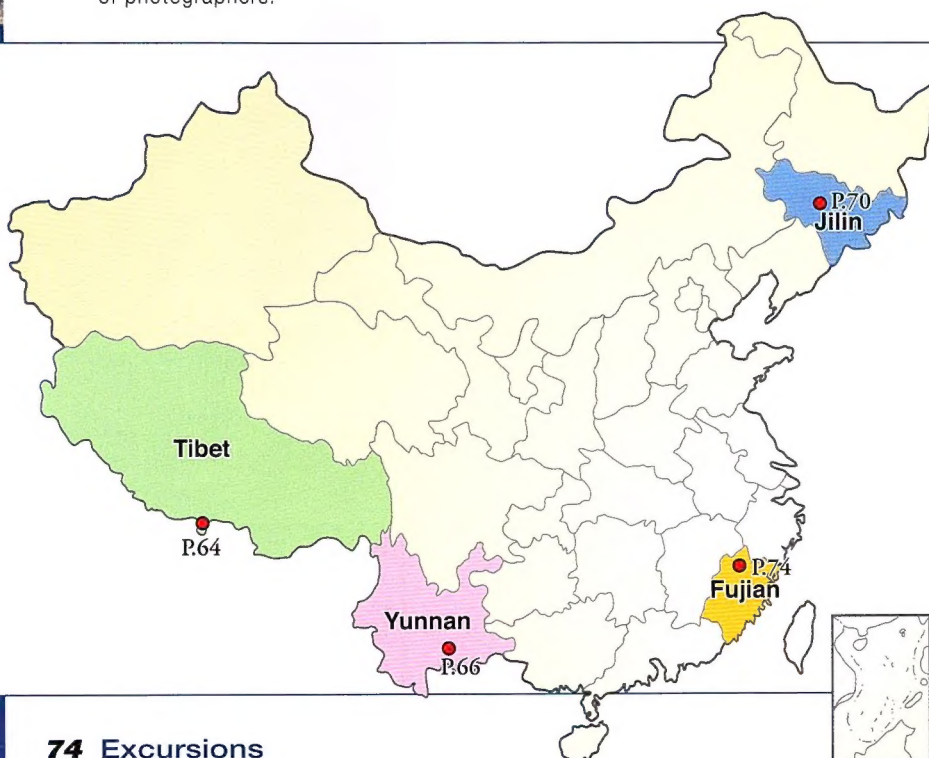
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## FROM THE EDITOR

# Legends of Taihang

You don't need to live within the constant bubble of city smog to be intoxicated by Taihang Mountains' beauty.

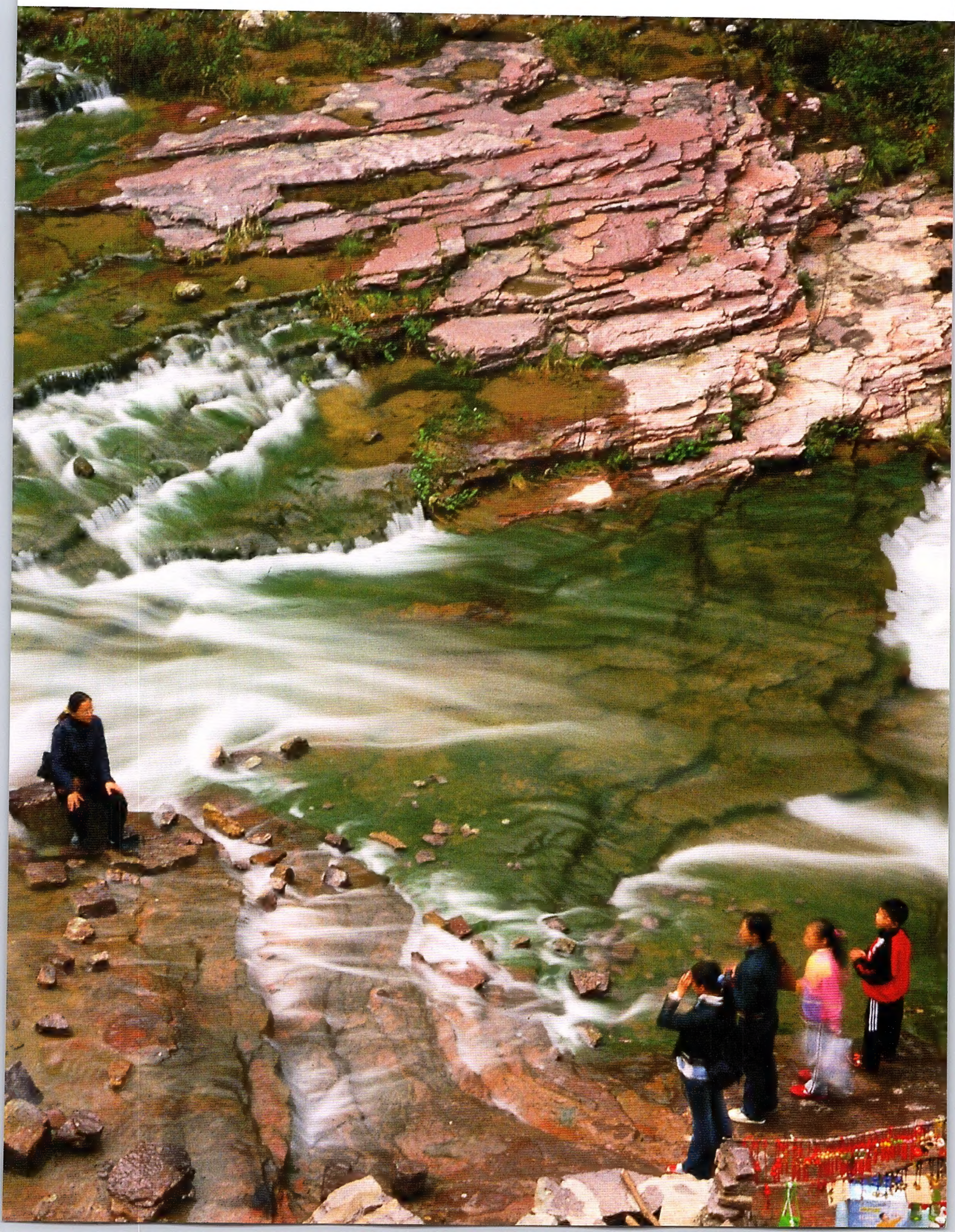
Taihang Mountains straddle across three provinces: Shanxi, Hebei and Henan. Aside from its captivating landscapes, these mountains are more than a mere escape from endless construction zones and larger-than-life skyscrapers. They stand out from the rest of the tourist hotspots because of the people who have created legends for the place.

Take Henan Province for example, water shortage used to be a major problem for the farmers 40 years ago. Villagers were extremely poor due to low crop yield, and they could barely afford a bath for celebrations. As a result, the people there made a joint effort to combat droughts by building a nearly 2,000-km long canal (presently named Red Flag Canal) that would divert water from its neighbouring province.

Standing by the canal, one cannot help but to be overwhelmed by the extraordinary effort and ingenuity needed to get the people out of poverty. The construction cost these people a decade of backbreaking labour and hundred of lives that were taken by accident-prone dynamites. After breaking 4000 hammers and 12 tons of chisels, the people of Henan finally made the once rocky and dry land fertile with the 400 million m<sup>3</sup> of water diverted annually.

The Peach Flower Valley of Linlu Mountain (Photo by Huangyanhong)









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## MAR/APR



**April 20-25**  
**Weifang City, Shandong Province**

**W**eifang is known as the 'World Kite Capital', and the head office of the International Kite Federation is located at the Weifang Kite Museum. International and domestic kite contests are held at the **Weifang International Kite Festival**, and the 10 best kites are selected.



**April 22**  
**Haikou, Tongshi and Sanya Cities, Hainan Province**

**H**eld on the Coconut Street, the **Hainan International Coconut Festival** is a gala of the Miao and Li minorities. It features the international dragon boat race, national martial arts contests, performances, sports, as well as Miao and Li wedding ceremonies.

**April 13-15**  
**Jinghong City, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province**

**T**he **Water Splashing Festival** is the New Year celebration for the Dai people. Prayer ceremonies are held at the Buddhist temples, traditional peacock dance is performed, dragon-boat races, other sports competitions are organized, and people sprinkle water on each other as an expression of good wishes.



**April 8-22**  
**Qianxi and Dafang Counties, Guizhou Province**

**T**he **Guizhou Azalea Festival** is packed with folk performances by the Yi, Miao and Buyi minorities. On top of that, visitors can participate in the Bonfire Revelry Festival, taste the local delicacies, as well as visit the famous Huangguoshu Cataract (one of the largest in China) and the scenic Zhijin Caves.

**April 15-25**  
**Luoyang City, Henan Province**

**L**uoyang began the cultivation of the peony 1,400 years ago, and over 350 varieties are grown there today. During the **Luoyang Peony Fair**, large performances are given. What's more, visitors may visit exhibitions of lanterns, paintings, calligraphy and photographs at the fair. In addition, the renown Longmen Grottoes, White Horse Temple and ancient tombs are just very close by.

**April 20-26**  
**Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province**

**T**he **Chang'an Annual International Calligraphy Meeting** will feature inscriptions that are written on a 100-m-long scroll and the four treasures of the study (writing brush, ink slab, ink stick and paper). The annual meeting certificates will be issued by Chinese and foreign calligraphers' association.



**April 4-6**  
**Qintong Town, Yangzhou City, Jiangsu Province**

**T**his **Boat Festival** is full of local flavour. Farmers from surrounding counties and townships are all gather here for boat races, different operas and lion and dragon dances.







## Shanghai's Garden City

Shanghai was granted the honour of "National Garden City" by the central government along with 16 other cities. Other newly named Garden Cities include Ningbo of Zhejiang Province, Wuxi of Jiangsu Province, Fuzhou of Fujian Province and Guilin of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Shanghai's green coverage and per capita green space have exceeded 35% and 6.5m<sup>2</sup> respectively — the bare minimum requirements for the designation.

In the long term, the city government expects to hold a "Green World Expo" in 2010 by planting more trees and eliminating admission prices to most of the city's 138 parks.

But to fully realise the "green plan", the city has to be more aware of its setbacks in urban landscaping and its business operation through the next seven years. The city not only wants more trees and grasslands in the downtown areas, but also a closer and much more enjoyable "green environment" for residents.

## Jade Is Hot

A growing number of people around the country are investing in jade as price of the precious stone rises while China's natural reserves shrink.

According to the Shanghai Gem and Jade Association, people tended to buy jade products as artwork or jewelry in the past, while those investing in the stone accounted for less than 10%. However, that figure has grown rapidly over the past two years to reach about 40%.

Unlike gold, which is priced by weight, jade's value is based on its size, shape and clarity. At present, Shanghai consumes up to US \$300 million dollars of jewelry a year, 10% of which is jade products. Around two years ago, that figure stood at less than 5 percent. Sales of jade products are booming of late mainly because of the increasing number of buyers and partly due to the rising price for the raw material.



## More National Forest Parks

The State Forestry Administration (SFA) has approved 64 new national forest parks across the country to build their own development and sustainable utilisation for eco-tourism. The SFA has required that overall plans be made in the parks, and any permanent construction project will be on hold until the plans are approved.

China's first forest park was established in 1982 in Zhangjiajie in northern Hunan Province. Since then, forest parks have become popular tourist destinations, and the tourists to these parks have been increasing at an annual rate of 30% since 1990. After the approval, the total number of forest parks now stands at 1,540, with 503 of them being national forest parks.



## Restoring Shaolin Temple

A group of 22 specialists from the China Society of Cultural Heritage and Henan Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau planned to restore the Shaolin Temple, the cradle of the famous Shaolin Boxing with a history of over 1,500 years.

The Shaolin Temple is located in the Songshan Mountain area, about 55 km southeast of Luoyang City and 65 km southwest of Zhengzhou, the provincial capital. Built in 496 during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-581), the temple was originally constructed for the Indian monk, Bodhidharma, who came to China to spread

Buddhism. The Chinese monks who followed him had later formed the Shaolin martial arts.

The key hall near the main entrance, minor halls, courtyards and roads will be completely renovated, while structures and steles not in harmony with the environment of a temple will be removed. New buildings would include a pagoda for Holy Scriptures, a museum for Shaolin boxing, as well as halls for the study of scriptures and prayer.

The repairs are expected to be completed by the National Day, which falls on October 1, and will be ready for the first world traditional boxing contest scheduled to be held in Zhengzhou City.



## Great Wall Is Not as Great

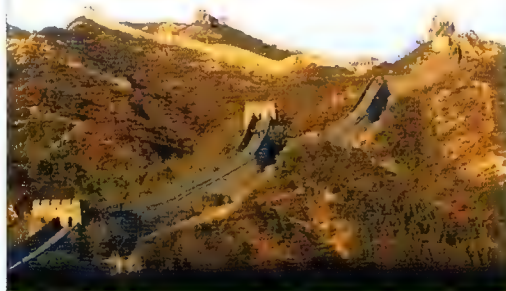
Booming tourism and lack of funding for protection are nibbling away the Great Wall, a famous landmark of China.

A latest report on the Great Wall shows that only one third of the 6,350 km of wall now exists and the length is still shortening.

The Great Wall was first built in the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) as a major defensive project and rebuilt in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Surviving the times, the Great Wall was listed as a world cultural heritage site in 1987 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The lack of conservation awareness was a serious threat. Many farmers along the wall don't even know that the Great Wall is under state protection. Wall bricks become their courtyard walls and even pigpens in some remote areas.

The Great Wall has offered popular scenic spots and brought huge profits in recent years. Statistics show that it receives about 10 million visitors every year all over the country. Yet, lack of funding for the cultural heritage departments to restore damages and install proper protection has further deteriorated the Great Wall.



## More Taxi Stations

Shanghai will build 350 more taxi ranks this year, with plans to increase the number to around 1,000 by 2005. Shanghai has completed seven such stations citywide so far, all of which are in active use.

Currently, Shanghai taxis simply stop at undesignated places on the streets to wait on customers. Taxi ranks are expected to restore road traffic order.



## Another 100 New McDonald's

McDonald's, the world's top fast food operator, is to open nearly 100 new outlets around China this year and promote McKIDS, a series of children-related products, to the Chinese market in April.

So far, the fast food giant have over 560 outlets in China's four municipalities of Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing, and more than 70 provincial cities.

McDonald's launched its franchise operation strategy in China last year. Individuals who have US \$300,000 to invest and over three years's operation experience in the catering sector, may apply for opening a franchise restaurant after specific training.

According to McDonald's China Development Company, due to the success of the first McDonald's franchise restaurant in China, launched last August in Tianjin, the franchise operation model will be expanded around the nation this year.

McDonald's is going head-to-head with KFC, who has 1,000 outlets in China to-date, in the fast-food industry for customers. KFC has put forward a range of new Chinese-style fast food, involving chicken rolls and soup, in the recent years to adapt to the tastes of local consumers.



## Eco-Tourism for Heilongjiang Province

The burgeoning growth of ecological tourism around the world in recent years has encouraged more and more cities in China to jump in to go with the flow, one of which is Jixi, a city in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province.

Adjacent to Russia on its eastern side, Jixi is located in the hinterland of the Three Rivers Plain and boasts forest coverage rate of more than 40%. With an area of about 20,000 km<sup>2</sup>, the city itself boasts considerable coverage of cultivated land, lakes and wetlands. Its 11 nature preserves and forest parks cover over 25% of the city's total area.

Xingkai Lake is one of the few lakes in the world of its size that features an undisturbed ecological system, unpolluted and with a great diversity of species. The Xingkai Lake National Nature Preserve is also included in the chain of Northeast Asia natural habitats for cranes, and the 220,000-ha Xingkai Lake swamp is listed among the world's key wetlands.

The area's natural beauty, together with the local folklore, has inspired Jixi municipal government to develop its tourism potential. A string of tourism packages have been developed, such as a scenic tour of Xingkai Lake and Wusuli River along the border with Russia, a wetland tour of Wandashan Forest and Zhenbao Island and an ice and snow sports tour.



## To Tip or Not to Tip

**Tip** In many countries and regions, tip is the major income for tour guides. However, for a long time, tip was treated as an illegal salary in China. The National Tourism Administration strictly prohibited tipping in order to promote a healthy tourism market, but insiders feel that the practice of tipping should be legalized and regulated so that hidden charges can be eliminated.

At present, tip has been institutionalized in China's inbound and outbound travels, but it remains unpopular in domestic travels. Most domestic tour guides still rely their incomes on commission by leading tourists to go shopping.

Nonetheless, a new peak of outbound travellers brought a revolutionary change during the Chinese New Year holidays. Many travel agencies listed tip charges openly in their package costs. This is out of imagination years ago, but during the peak travel season, tourists all show their understanding and take a cooperative attitude.

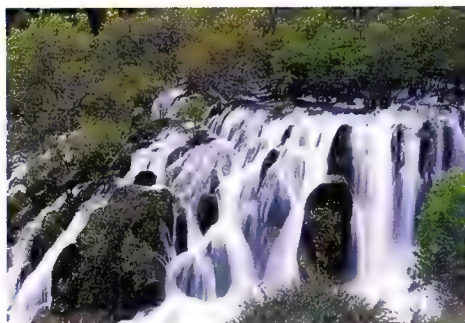
## Mad about Giant Pandas

**Sichuan** Southwest China's Sichuan Province is best known as the home of the endangered giant panda. The humid and mild climate is good for the growth of arrow bamboo — the staple food for giant pandas — and it has turned the region into an ideal natural habitat for pandas.

This province, abounded in tourism resources, including Mount Emei, picturesque

Jiuzhaigou, Leshan Grand Buddha, and Sanxingdui site, is determined to become a tourism giant by 2010.

The province had 85 million tourist arrivals last year and chalked up over US \$5 billion dollars in tourism revenue. The rate is expected to go up another 15% this year.



## New Terminal at Tibet Airport

**Tibet** A new passenger terminal at Gongga Airport in Lhasa, capital of Tibet Autonomous Region, went into operation after more than two years of construction.

The modern terminal, which costs over US \$33 million dollars, is equipped with the state-of-the-art service facilities, and it can serve about 1,300 passengers an hour.

## New Nature Reserves

**Heilongjiang** Two more nature protection zones in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province have been promoted to state-level nature reserves, bringing the total number of such reserves to 14 in the province.

The Nanwong River Nature Reserve (in the Greater Hinggan Mountain area)

is rich with forests, wetlands, meadows and lakes; it is home to more than 50 rare animal species and birds, such as sables and white ibises.

Located in the northeast plain (around Heilong, Songhua and Nen Rivers), the Bacha Island Nature Reserve covers many islands, ponds and swamps. The reserve is also rich with plants, wild animals, aquatic plants and fish.

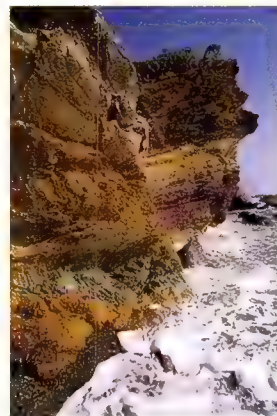
Heilongjiang Province now has 151 nature reserves of various levels, about 10% of its total land space.



## Fast Rail Brings Crowd

**Liaoning** Dalian Golden Pebble Beach (Liaoning Province) attracted more than 2 million tourists in 2003, among one-quarter of them arrived by fast rail train.

The number of tourists last year has increased by 30% of its preceding year, mostly due to the opening of the fast rail train. Numbers of travellers were attracted by a series of activities organised by the "Fast Rail Train Golden Pebble Tourism Year". It's been customs for Dalian local citizens to have a outdoor tour at Golden Pebble Beach at each weekend.





## Coal Mine Tour

**Shanxi** Datong city, a leading coal production base in north China's Shanxi province, has opened one of its largest coal mines to tourists so that they can witness the entire mining process and get a taste of the miners' lives.

The 48-year-old Jinhuaogong mine, located 12 km west of the city, covers 41 km<sup>2</sup> and has an annual output of 3.8 million tn.

The local tourism centre has opened up a platform 300 m underground, where tourists can study the geological structure of the mine and see what coal was like back in the Jurassic period, 140 million years ago.

Many travel services have included the underground tour as a new highlight in their plans outlined for domestic and overseas tour groups to Shanxi province.

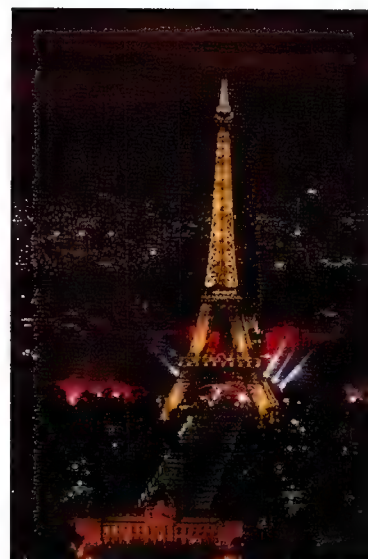
The mine tour takes one and a half hours, during which time travellers donning miners' overalls and safety helmets are sent 300 m underground in a "cage", squinting into the dim glow from kerosene lamps.

Tourists will see how coal has been separated from earth at different periods of history, and can chat with the miners and join them for a brief lunch to find out more about the workers' lives.

## Cheap Air Fare to Europe

**Guangdong** Air France A340-300 is the first European carrier to fly Paris-Shanghai and Paris-Beijing. The carrier will provide five return flights per week between Guangzhou (Guangdong Province) and Paris and increase to seven flights per week after Jun 14. The direct flight, which takes about 11 hours and 40 minutes, is likely to have a positive effect on tourism and bilateral trade. This new air service is expected to bring the price of a European tour down to below US \$1200.

Meanwhile, China Southern Airlines will open a flight to France by May, and Lufthansa Airlines also plans to open direct flight to Guangzhou soon.



## Changbei Airport Raise to International Status

**Jiangxi** The first international air route that links Nanchang, capital of Jiangxi Province, with overseas destinations, is to be launched in May.

The Changbei Airport recorded a traffic volume of 1 million passengers last year, and it will be raised to international status for overseas airlines following the state assessment. The provincial airport group decided that the first international route would first link Nanchang and Osaka in Japan.



## Direct Flight to Japan

**Zhejiang** All Nippon Airways, or ANA, the leading air carrier in Japan, announced that it will open two brand-new international routes linking Tokyo and Osaka of Japan and Hangzhou, capital of east China's Zhejiang Province, when it initiates its summer schedule.

Four flights will be available on the Narita-Hangzhou route each week while three on the Kansai-Hangzhou route. ANA elaborated that Hangzhou is the one of the Chinese cities

visited most frequently by Japanese after Shanghai and Beijing Cities, and it is both a transport hub in the Yangtze River Delta region and a famous scenic spot.

Among the foreigners residing longtime in Hangzhou, more than 40% are Japanese.



## New Flight to Singapore

**Jiangsu** Travellers between Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province, and Singapore will have more choices when Singapore Airlines begins regular flights between the two cities from March 28. The airline will operate Boeing 777-200 or 777-300 aircraft on the route.

Nanjing's Lukou International Airport is a major cargo airport in east China, handling 1 million tn of cargo and 4,000 passengers annually. The airport, which opened in 1997, operates 78 domestic and international air routes.





# Legends of the Taihang Mountains

Photos by Wang Shuzhou, Shang Jianjun, Huang Yanhong, Shi Baoxiu  
Article by Huang Yanhong, Shi Baoxiu

About 600 million years ago, the seabed was shaken by the movement of the earth's crust. It kept rising and falling unsteadily before finally being squeezed and stretched into a high range of hills called the Taihang Mountains, which now stand in the place where

Shanxi, Henan and Hebei Provinces meet.

About 3,300 years ago, the 22nd emperor of the Shang Dynasty, Wu Ding, appointed a slave he met on the Taihang Mountains to be the prime minister, leaving a legend behind.





**Sixty years ago**, also on the Taihang Mountains, Mr. Si from the Beiyao Village slayed 14 Japanese soldiers in one battle. Still hale and hearty at 88 this year, he clenches his teeth bitterly at the mention of the past Japanese invasion.

**Forty years ago**, an incredibly complex engineering project began. Hundreds of thousands of villagers hammered and chiseled into the huge, hard mountains, and together they built the 1,500-km Hongqi (Red Flag) Canal along the sheer cliffs on high peaks.

**Ten years ago**, Mr. Zhang returned to his home town after many years away. He donated over a million yuan and led the villagers to build a new

road in the mountains. At the opening ceremony, an elderly couple, both aged 80, knelt down and cried for their son, who fell down a cliff while climbing up the "heavenly ladder" on the steep mountains, which had been the only way into the village.

**Nowadays**, the canal diverts the much-needed moisture to the fields in and outside the Taihang Mountains. Yet the clang of hammers never stopped, as the road stretches inch-by-inch deep into the mountains. People are busy building roads and bridges, greening the Taihang Mountains, promoting tourism, creating and telling the stories of the mountains day after day....



# Major Scenic Areas in the Southern Taihang Mountains

Varying in height from 1,000 to 2,000 m above sea level, the Taihang Mountains stretch across three provinces, namely the Shaanxi Province (on the west), Hebei Province (on its east) and Henan Province (on its south). Here are some of the scenic highlights surrounding these provinces:

The canyon runs 30 km long from Huishanqiao in Rencun Town, of Linzhou City in the north, to Jind Village in Pinshun County, Shanxi Province in the south. It is 200 m wide from east to west, the narrowest place being only 60 m. A plank road winds along the cliff, looking down into the canyon gives a magnificent view. The canyon area boasts such scenic spots as Wangxiangyan, Xianli Mountain, Peach Flower Valley, Taihang Pingli Lake and Jind Mountain International Skiing Base.



**Taihang Grand Canyon**

It is a architecture wonder created by the people of Linxian County, Henan Province, in the 1960s; the construction took over 10 years' effort and people were working under very difficult conditions. The 1,500-km irrigation canal winds along the Taihang Mountains. Now the canal has become a tourist attraction. Its scenic spots include Water Divide Park, Qingnian (Youth) Cave and Luosi Pool.



**Red Flag Canal**



**Guoliang**

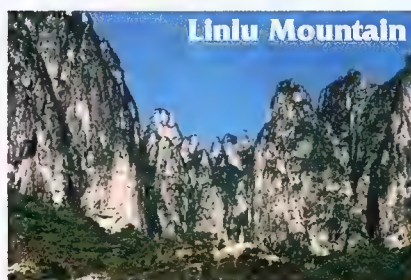
Located within the Wanxian Mountain Scenic Area, Guoliang is a mountainous village where people are friendly and the

natural scenery is beautiful. It began to attract the attention of filmmakers after the well-known Chinese director, Xie Jin, shot the movie "The Bell from Qingliang Temple" here. More than 40 films have been made here since.

The village also offers an ideal base for students and painters to portray landscapes. The largest number of visiting students Guoliang received a day was 2,000. One of the wonders of Guoliang Village is the Guoliang Tunnel of more than 1,000 m long, which was built by the villagers in the 1970s.

A section of Taihang Mountains west to Linzhou City is called Linlu Mountains.

The area has a long history and boasts a distinctive natural landscape and places of cultural interest. It



**Linlu Mountain**

has been a resort area since the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386-589). Among the visitors were emperors, generals, high-ranking officials, great writers and famous doctors. The Linlu Mountain Scenic Area comprises of two spots — the Red Flag Canal and Taihang Grand Canyon.



**Wulongkou**

Located in Wulongkou Town 15 km northeast of Jiyuan City and covering 128 km<sup>2</sup>, Wulongkou Tourist Resort features five scenic areas: hot springs, Panggu Valley, Bihe River, Chouer Valley and Yangluo Mountain.

There are 68 places of natural and cultural interest, including Fangkou Qin Dynasty water conservancy works and Pangu Temple. Wulongkou is a state rhesus monkey nature reserve. Inside the rhesus monkey garden, the monkey hosts keep on good terms with tourists. Having received training in etiquette, they have found favor with tourists.



**Wangwu Mountain**

Wangwu Mountain Scenic Area is 35 km from Jiyuan City, with rolling peaks and ridges. It is one of the nine famous mountains in ancient China. During the 206 BC - 265 AD period, the mountain was regarded by Taoists as the first dwelling of the immortals. Its major peak, Tianfan, is 1,715 m above sea level. Emperor Xuanyuan, the ancestor of the Chinese nation, set up an altar here to worship.







**Luojie Village**

The name came from the first daughter of the Luo family who occupied the mountain and claimed herself as monarch during the Sui Dynasty (581-618). Today, some damaged walls still remain on the high mountains. The mountain area was a battlefield many times. Because of its steepness, it is very difficult to reach the top. The farthest village, Haloba, is made of stone. It is the best place to enjoy the sunrise.



**Nanping**

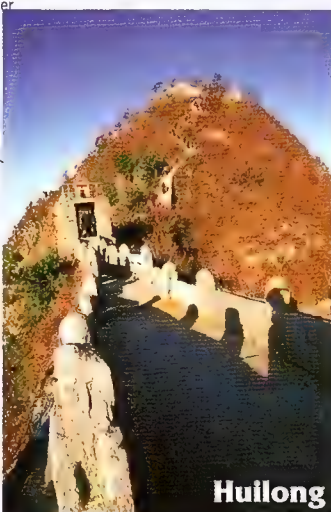
Located at the centre of Wanxian Mountain, Nanping has a dangerously steep and high peak. Within the scenic area are two waterfalls (Black Dragon Pool and White Dragon Pool), Red Village, Shenglong Stone Tower, Shenglong Peak and General's Peak. Nanping has a good vegetation with forest coverage reaching 80%, and the trees were planted by the villagers over a period of 45 years. Several other natural villages are well known in the area, including Linlu, Hejian, and Tangyin.



**Wanxian Mountain**

Shayao Township, of Huixian County, deep in the Taihang Mountains, has a unique landscape with a red cliff canyon, 20 km long, 200 m deep and more than 500 m wide. The narrowest place is only one metre wide. Wanxian Mountain valley is home of many pools, waterfalls and brooks. All scenic spots that have been developed so far are in the territories of Nanping and Guoliang Villages.

The major attraction of Huilong Village is Laoye Peak, which attracted many worshippers and pilgrims in ancient times. The highest point is 1,570 m above sea level, and it can be reached by gondola. The place gives a panorama of views, including the Shimen Reservoir, the undulating mountain ranges and the villages at the foot. The most ancient building on Laoye Peak is Zhenwu Temple. It is not clear when the temple was first built. The remaining buildings were built during the 1522-1566 period. The original hall for worshipping has been destroyed. The remaining hall faces the Southern Heaven Gate. The walls of the hall were made of stone and the roof is covered with iron tiles.

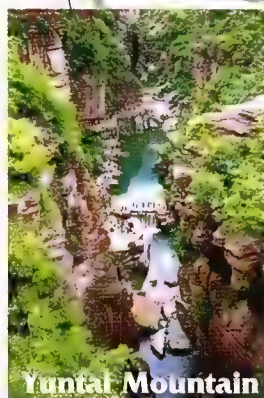


**Huilong**

This scenic area is now under joint development by Guanshan Village and Matoukou Village at the foot. Guanshan Mountain is rich in natural resources. On the mountain are several places where visitors can appreciate the view of the entire southern section of Taihang Mountains. In autumn, the mountain is covered with red leaves. Stone houses, millstones and stone troughs can be seen everywhere in the village.



**Guanshan Mountain**



**Yuntai Mountain**

Located in Xiuwu County 40 km northeast of Jiaozuo City, this scenic spot covers an area of 35 km<sup>2</sup>, neighbouring Shanxi Province in the north and Huixian County in the east. In the area are mountains with steep and dangerous cliffs, stones of grotesque shapes and appearance, green cypresses, 36 well-known peaks and a dozen natural caves. Thanks to its unique natural scenery, it has become the most popular tourist resort in Henan. In history, Yuntai Mountain was where the seven noted wise men from the Jin Dynasty (265-420) lived in seclusion. Some ruins connected to these men remain today.



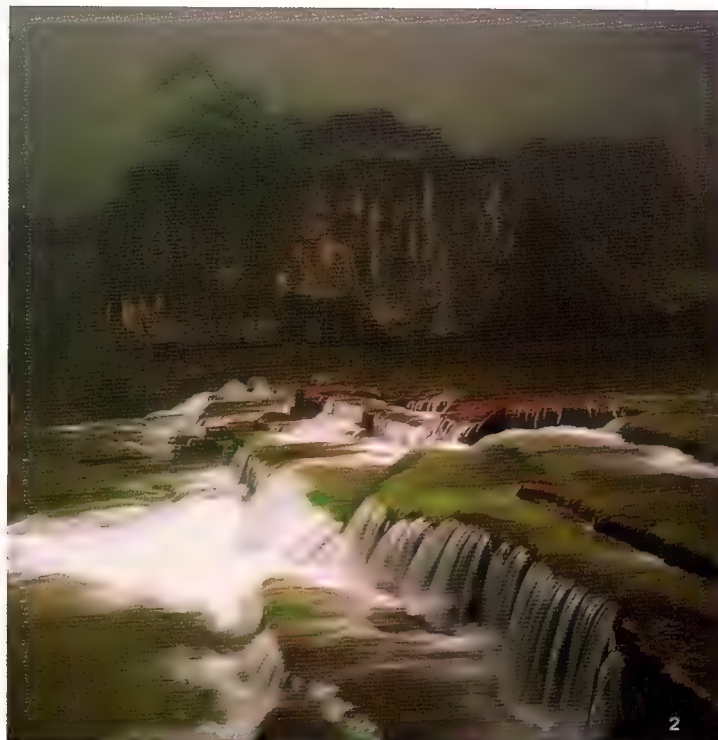




**T**he Taihang Mountains stretch majestically from the Juma River in northern Hebei Province down to the northern side of the Yellow River in Henan Province, forming a northeast-southwest range. It is one of the few north-to-south mountain ranges in China, serving as a natural boundary between the Loess Plateau and the North China Plain.

A statesman and scientist of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1279), Shen Kuo, studied about

the evolution of the earth. Learning from the fossils of conches and clams in the rocks of the Taihang Mountains, he concluded that the Taihang Mountains used to be a vast ocean. As a result of the frequent movement of the earth's crust after the water receded, a lush forest grew on the wide swamp area, which led to the rich accumulation of coal. The Taihang Mountains rose gradually after each movement of the earth's crust. Finally, a rupture occurred between the mountains and the North China Plain, thus the landform of the Taihang Mountains — steep on the east and sloping on the west — took shape.







n the legendary mountains, every peak looks inspiring and every ravine can tell a story.

The ancient stories are mysterious and marvelous: the fable of the Faithful Old Man who moved mountains, the legend of a slave turned into the prime minister, the Seven Virtuous Gentlemen who lived in the Bamboo Grove, Sister Luo who became the chieftain of a mountain, the brilliant Guoliang who deceived an entire fleet of army with only a sheep and a drum.... These ancient stories have become part of the culture of the mountains, each adding to the rich heritage of history.

Traces of the past are fading with time. The shoulder poles, which the older generation of deliverymen used to carry baggage with, can rarely be seen now; and not surprisingly, most of the people from the new generation are currently engaged in tourism. Nonetheless, the modern stories are just as real and soul stirring — every inch of the Hongqi Canal marks a record of hardship, blood and sweat.









**T**here is, however, another group of people who once lived in the mountains. Originally the descendants of the villagers, they left their hometown to make a living elsewhere. All year round, they are found hiking up and down the mountains and ravines, not to farm or to pick herbs, but to capture images of these spectacular mountains.

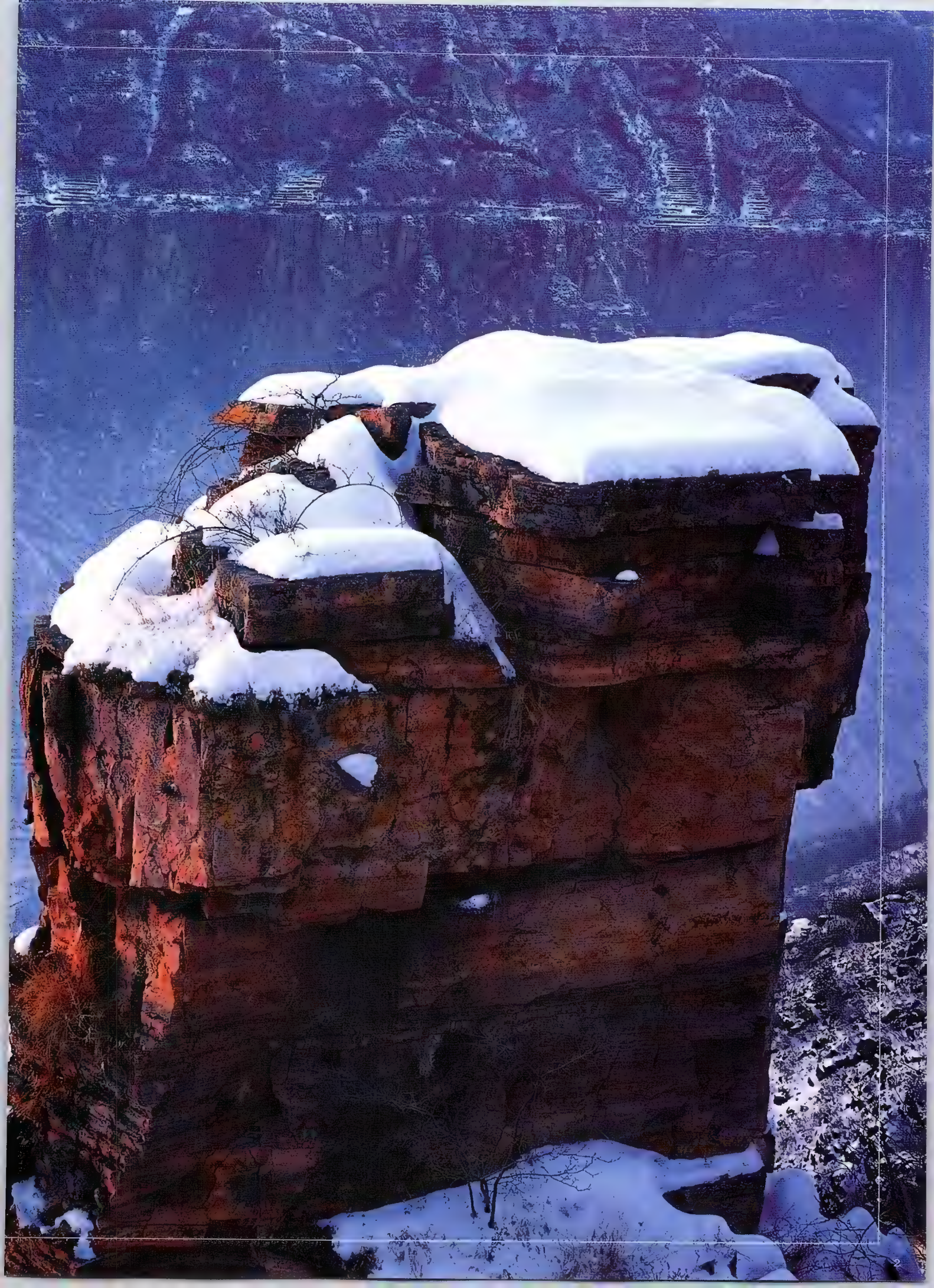
The diary of Wang Shuzhou (a photographer who has been shooting on Taihang Mountains for almost 30 years) wrote, "Standing on top of the peaks, I look around at the billowy mountains in the cold swift wind. While wondering at the marvelous, illusive clouds over the mountains, I feel as if my heart were floating as high as the clouds, bathed in the brilliance of the sun and moon. All these years, the mountains have given rise to a noble spirit. I feel that as soon as one becomes in touch with nature, one would gain the strong and intense feeling that surges from within like a grand heroic melody, which will further strengthen the bonding between a person and nature."

Previous Page: The glorious sea of clouds (By Su Jianping)

1. The Wanxian Mountain in Huixian County (By Wang Shuzhou)

2. Winter is an unpredictable season in the Taihang Mountains. (By Wang Shuzhou)











I like mountains. When I was young I was often touched by their hues.

At the foot of the snow-capped mountains with flocks of sheep and sutra streamers, I would often pray silently after photo shootings, totally intoxicated in the dream-like realm.

A month ago, as I walked in the southern Taihang Mountains (in Henan Province), I was suddenly filled with an even more intense feeling. The cliffs lay bare, looking massive, stretching for thousands of miles. I was absolutely impressed by the steep precipices, the almost vertically cut ravines and the zigzag mountain paths.

The southern Taihang Mountains are little known to tourists. I was amazed by the scenic spots from Linzhou down south along the mountains: the grand canyon of Linlu Mountain, the Hongqi Canal, Guoliang Cave, Nanping Village, the Laoye Summit at Huilong, as well as the areas under development such as Guanshan Mountain, Sister Luo's Stockaded Village, Yuntai Mountain, Wangwu Mountain, Wulongkou Pass....



1. Three thousand years ago, this is where the king met a slave and turned him into the prime minister. People thus named these precipitous cliffs Wangxiangyan. (By Huang Yanhong)  
2. Clouds and mist veiling the rocks (By Wang Shuzhou)



# People of the Taihang Mountains

Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong

**B**eiyao Village is a naturally formed hamlet of 20 families. The road leading here winds up and down the mountains and valleys. This newly built concrete road is only 3.5 m wide.

## Freedom Fighter

As I walked by, I saw an old man basking in the courtyard. This was a typical farmer's house with corn drying on the wall and crabapple slices on the flat roof of the kitchen. The old man seemed excited at a sight of a stranger, and he looked like he had a lot to say.

I walked up to greet him. He talked loudly so I could hear him clearly.

It turned out that he was a hero of the war against Japanese invasion 60 years ago.

His strong local accent was difficult to understand sometimes, and therefore, his son became my interpreter.

His name is Si Fengwu, now 88. During the War of Resistance Against the Japanese Aggression, he joined the Eighth Route Army, fighting in the Taihang Mountains.

Si was a sharpshooter. Once at a military gathering, the commander announced that whoever could shoot out the electric wire on the far-away mountain, he would be given 50 bullets. Si stood out at once. He laid on the ground and raised his 79-type rifle. Taking a quick aim, he broke the wire with one shot and got loud cheers from those who watched.

Si lost his hearing in the battlefield. One evening, he found a



Japanese soldier hiding on the ridge of a field, and he crept up on him. But the soldier spotted him first and lunged at him with a bayonet. He dodged and grabbed the bayonet, but the soldier's gun went off near his right ear and his ear was deaf ever since.

Si was strongly built, and because he used to practise martial arts in his younger days, he was an exceptionally brave warrior. The Japanese army once put up a warrant for him, specifically made known to "nail him on the city gate alive".

Once he was surrounded by a team of Japanese soldiers. They wanted to catch him alive, so they didn't shoot. One Japanese soldier charged at him and tackled him from behind. He bent forward, then raised his head swiftly. The soldier's chin was hit very hard. Si freed himself, and turned back to shoot his enemies. At the fall of the first man, another charged forward and held him again. Si stomped hard on his feet, then shot him at close range. In that battle, he slayed 14 Japanese soldiers in total, and was honored as the army's hero.

He has an old comrade in arms, Guo Xing, who was a well-known commander in the War, and he even took up the role as a team leader in the movie "Guerrilla on the Plain". The old man became very excited



1. Shoufengao — a typical village in the Taihang Mountains. (By Huang Yanhong)
2. Old man Si showed all pieces of bone fragments he carried for the war. (By Huang Yanhong)
3. Who would have guessed that the flat stone terraces are top of Taihang Mountains are the best place to dry crabapples? (By Wang Shuzhen)
4. Taihang Mountains covered with haws. (By Qi Fuliang)





when talking about his comrade, recalling how Guo used to disguise himself in different missions. He once led his team members to bomb the Japanese airplanes. Guo broke the wire fences and they got through, setting two Japanese planes on fire.

"Once Guo and I covered ourselves with wet quilts and went to bomb a Japanese blockhouse. I tied four landmines on myself. The Japanese fired 30 bullets at me, but I dashed forward and blew up the blockhouse nonetheless." His eyes grew wide as he spoke.

Once Guo, now a commander of the Northern Military Area, visited his friend in Huixian County. The two old men embraced each other in tears. Guo said, "I didn't expect to see you alive."

Si no longer has the martial bearing of his younger years. His right leg is seriously deformed, five centimetres shorter than his left leg, and he cannot walk without a stick.

In a battle in 1944, a Japanese machine gunner hit his leg. There

were soldiers who tried to capture him, while he, lying on the ground, slayed two more of them. Too bad his comrades did not save Si in time, for he was handicapped before reaching the age of 30.

He pulled up his pants to let me see his badly twisted and deformed ankle. "There was no medicine at that time, so the flesh festered. The Japanese airplanes came constantly and we had to hide





# People of the Taihang Mountains



from air raids all day long. I couldn't get any treatment at the hospital so I had to go home."

"What did you do after you returned home? There was not even a doctor in the village."

"The wound festered frequently, so he had to operate on himself," his son said.

The old hero talked as if it were someone else's story. Without any sedative, he cut open his ankle with a razor, and took out six pieces of broken bone.

The old man asked his son to fetch a small package. Wrapped in several covers were the six pieces of broken bone he removed.

"He wouldn't allow us to throw them away, saying that they were his own flesh and bone. After he dies, they will be returned to his body again," his son said.

That must be the last wish of the veteran: to be a whole man again after death. He asked me to take a couple of pictures as he tried to put the six pieces on his shin with a shaky hand.

When I left, Si insisted on seeing me off to the village entrance. He walked on a crutch that had a cotton cushion under his armpit. When tired, he had to sit down for a break. The veteran had just one modest wish: a wheelchair. He told me that the government's civil affairs department had promised to give him one, but it never came.

As a hero who stood out bravely at the time of national crisis, he deserves better. His only wish is to sit in a wheelchair when he is too tired to walk, so that he can look at the Taihang Mountains where he fought decades ago.

I sighed and could not help but to look back at Si as he struggled home. After a blast of mountain wind, the deep autumn leaves dance in the air. The

crabapple trees stand out on the slopes. In backlight, their swaying dense branches took the colour of silver, looking old yet strong.

## The Shrinking Village

The Huluba (Gourd Handle) Village sits atop a gourd-shaped mountain. The small plain of Shayao Village lies at its foot.

I walked to a farmer's house after taking some pictures of the sunrise.

"The crabapples sell for 30 cents half a kilogram, and the dried ones for one yuan a kilogram," Qin Wen, 65, told me as he sliced the crabapples.

He used a simple, homemade pressing and cutting device. It was a rack with three razors. He put four to five crabapples under the razors each time and he could cut up to 200 kg of crabapples a day. But the best crabapples are all cut by hand to make better slices. It takes only two or three sunny days to dry the sliced crabapples on the stones.

There used to be nine households in the village, but two had moved down the mountain.

Qin is the only person living in the house. "I have no choice. My son couldn't get married up here. He went down to Nanzhai Village on the plain and found himself a wife who didn't want to live on the mountain. I stay here alone most of the year, but get down to stay with my grandchildren in winter. I come up to the mountain in February and get down to the plain in November. Why do I insist to stay here? Because it's easier to make a living on the mountain than down on the plain, as I can earn a few thousand yuan a year! If I plant on my over 1,000m<sup>2</sup> of farmland in the summer, I would get about 1,000 kg of crabapples from my trees by autumn. On top of that, there are many kinds of wild herbs in the mountains. So whenever I have time, I would go out to pick them. Besides, The temperature here changes a lot, and the ground is pretty cool. I can always reap something after planting, more than down on the plain. There are many kinds of fruit trees on the mountains and I can sell them in the Nanzhai Village, so I will not be too badly off."

"Do the children come up here?"

"Yes, both my son and his wife would drive up here in their car, and they would return the same day with my corn and crabapples. They don't like to stay up here for long. Actually, Nanzhai Village is not as good as here. Although my son has a bit more land than me, but he is just barely getting by."

"Then why don't your son and daughter-in-law like to stay here?" I asked.

"They like to stay on the plain, where the town life is always full of activities."

"Then you should be better off, shouldn't you?"

"No, I have a debt to pay. We owed about 30,000 yuan (~US \$4000) of operation fees on my wife. She passed away almost 10 years ago, but we still haven't repaid all the debt. It will be three more years before we can clear it."

Qin will be 68 before he is free of debt. What hill folks dread most

- 1. The homes of peasant appear to be hanging from the steep cliff. (By Wang Shuzhou)
- 2. Wandering from one village to another can help one to experience the life of local residents. (By Huang Yanhong)
- 3. The highway built by the locals of Huilong Village brings hope. (By Huang Yanhong)



is getting sick, because even just one serious illness can wipe out the whole family's savings. The folks in the Taihang Mountains desperately need a health insurance plan.

### The Hero Who Fought the Leopard

Danfen Village is separated from Shanxi Province by a ravine, behind which lies Wufeng Mountain.

I stayed at Yang Jinxiu's family. He is only 30 years old, but his hair has already been greying. A short man, rather shy when he talks, he is always smiling and friendly.

His family is quite popular in the village, as his father Yang Fushan once rid a leopard for the village.

A fierce leopard haunted the village more than forty years ago, and constantly preying on domestic animals. In order to get rid of this leopard, a hunting team was formed from several villages in the area, and his father Yang Fushan, or Old Yang, was one of the members.

One day, the leopard was found in the woods near Danfen Village. Old Yang rushed at it while other people fled in fear. Just as he was about to shoot, the leopard spotted him and lunged. Little did Old Yang realise that the ammunition was damp and his gun couldn't fire. He had

no choice but to throw the gun at the leopard, which retreated about 20 m. Old Yang picked up his gun to check it just as the leopard charged again. He ran to the side of the cliff. As there was no way out, he grasped a small tree by the cliff. The leopard pounced on his back and tore a large piece of skin from his scalp, revealing his skull and pierced his cheek. Blood ran profusely from his head, but he bowed as low as he could and, freeing one hand and pushed the leopard with all his might down the cliff. At this point, other people from the hunting team came to his rescue and shot at the leopard. Old Yang passed out and





## People of the Taihang Mountains



was carried home.

The 60-kg leopard was also carried back to the village. Its meat was shared by all the villagers and its skin was sold for 20 yuan, which was just enough to cover Old Yang's medical treatment.

Four years ago, the brave old man passed away, but his heroic act was spread all over town. His son, Jinxiu, used to follow him hunting. As a sharpshooter, Jinxiu too could kill about 70 wild goats a year. But his shooting skill has gotten rusty since hunting was banned. He said that he would not dare to shoot any wild creatures even if they were attacking domesticated animals, for fear of being convicted.

Jinxiu is very diligent and full of business ideas. A few years ago, he started renting his 3,000-yuan, 16-mm film projector. His business was going so well that he had extended his service to all the villages within 10 km of his hometown. People would ask Jinxiu to play movie at their houses as entertainment whenever there are family celebrations. But now that almost every family has a TV set, his business is dropping off. Therefore, he bought himself a three-wheel van to start his delivery business.

When we were about to leave his house, he was starting up his van to buy some coal for the family from Shanxi Province.

Looking at the mountain road that seems to hang halfway up the cliffs, I asked him how he dared to drive on such a dangerous route. He said that he was used to it; besides, the coal he was collecting was a bargain – only 180 yuan a ton, which was enough to warm up his whole family through the winter.

### Paving the Way to Better Roads

Huilong (Returning Dragon) Village is located deep in the mountains of Shangbali Township.

The road leading to the village winds tortuously; yet, it is amazingly smooth. But it is not always like this.

It used to be extremely difficult for the hill folks to get out of the mountains, especially for the villagers from the five hamlets on Laoyeding (Lord's Summit), for they were separated from the other villages by a precipice of 15 km long and over 200 m high. The only route out was the Old Lord's Heavenly Ladder, a path of 60 cm wide snaking along the sheer cliffs. The path was so hazardous that there were at least 18 lives being lost on the Heavenly Ladder.

This is why, in Huilong Village, the name of Zhang Rongsuo is

1. The village consists several hamlets scattered like stars around the mountains. (By Sheng Jiantong)
2. Sheep are one of the most important possessions of the villagers. (By Huang Tonghong)
3. The perennials trees in Miaohe Township, Hei County. (By Wang Shuzhou)



spoken with reverence. Ten years ago, Zhang, who had made himself a millionaire, volunteered to take the post of village head and led his fellow villagers out of poverty. From the end of 1997, Zhang initiated the road construction project. For three years, he lived on the worksite. At the critical moment when the project was short of funds, he sold all his property — his car, his stone processing factory and his house — and gathered a million yuan to complete the project.

I heard from a villager that in order to collect funds, Zhang even persuaded his mother to donate over 3,000 yuan, her entire savings from raising chickens and pigs for many years.

At the village committee of the Huilong Village, I met Zhang, a strong man with a broad swarthy face. He had just returned from the worksite, looking tired.

I asked him why he devoted himself all to the public welfare project while sacrificing his own business.

He replied, "Hill folks are always short of resources, and they can hardly get by without extra help."

"Since you have devoted so much money, are you expecting to be a shareholder in the project?"

"No, my money is a donation, but others' money will be repaid in the future," Zhang replied.

After the eight-kilometre road around the mountain was opened to traffic, the 1,000-m Qingfengguan Tunnel was driven through the 200-m-high cliff on January 10, 2001. The dream of generations of Huilong villagers had finally come true. But Zhang remembered one particularly special moment.

An 80-year-old villager, Grandpa Dong, and his wife came to see the tunnel at the opening ceremony. They knelt on the ground, tears rolling down their wrinkled cheeks. The elderly lady touched the damp tunnel wall and cried, "My dear son, your fellow brother has built a new road for us. It's wide and safe, leading all the way to our house. If only you could come back, I'll be waiting for you at home." It turned out that a few years before, their youngest son had fallen from the cliff here and died.

I walked through the tunnel, and looked down at the entrance. The winding road, extending far into the mountain, was spectacular. The local people told me that in order to show their gratitude to Zhang, they had been planning to erect a memorial tablet in praise of his contribution. When Zhang learnt of their plan, he rushed over and declined the goodwill of the villagers. However, there is already a monument built in the hearts of the villagers.

Before I left, I asked if I could take a picture of Zhang. He hurriedly put on an army green jacket and told me that it was his uniform.

### The Dentist Who Tried to Fly

Guanshan Village consists of 32 hamlets scattered like stars around the mountains.

Early one morning, I set off to another village, accompanied by Ren Tongxi. As he was over 50 years old, we called him Old Ren. He is a

very kind man, always trying to carry bags for us lest we grew tired.

When we reached the highest viewpoint at Dongbatou, the sun was already up and spreading its golden rays on the huge precipice. This is the ideal place to overlook the Taihang Mountains. One can even see the capital of Henan Province, Zhengzhou, and the Yellow River on a clear day.

We passed an one horse town on our way. There used to be a family living there, but because the child had to go to school, the family moved away 10 years ago. Many hamlets are like this, with only one or two families in the village. Now only 18 hamlets in that mountain are inhabited.

Old Ren told us many interesting stories about his family and his village life.

There was a time when an old sow in his house ran away, but to everyone's surprise, it came back home with a group of piglets after four months. All the piglets had pointy mouths and buttocks. Old Ren suspected that the father of these piglets was a wild boar, for they could jump much higher than the normal piglets. Hence, Old Ren had to raise the pigsty to keep them in. Unexpectedly, these crossbreed pigs made better meat and they sold well. Not only that, they had managed to draw attention from nearby villages, and even attracted a group of tourists to visit! The animals, however, had never been watched by so many strangers and they ran around in fear. From then on, any wild boar would become first class guest in Old Ren's ranch.

One person who kept cropping up in Old Ren's conversation was a man named Wan Erguang. He became known for his many crazy





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antics, some wise and some foolish, which have become household stories.

One day, Wang Erguang suddenly hit upon an idea to fly. He found a pair of eagle wings, and tied a big dustpan to his legs to increase his lift-off power. Jumping from a 20-m cliff, he plunged to the ground below the cliff. He was confined to his bed for a month. If a tree branch had not broken his fall, he would have been more miserable. That year he was just over 40.

As a self-taught dentist, he was visited by many people who needed to renew teeth fillings. When he ran out of filling material, he would use sheep or dog's teeth, even stone crystal. Once he wanted to make himself a new set of teeth, but he needed a mould. Since



there was no material suitable for the mould, he thought of using plastic. So he got some plastic soles from worn shoes, heated them on the fire to soften the material, and then applied the hot plastic directly to his teeth. His gums ended up badly blistered and the plastic stuck to his teeth so tightly that he couldn't remove it. He couldn't eat for half a month and survived on watery porridge.

We came to the hamlet of Qingshishuang. The village committee used to meet here as it was inhabited by dozens of families. But gradually most of them moved away and only three families remain. An old school was also removed. The biggest row of stone buildings in the village was the sanatorium of the Eighth Route Army, set up in 1942, for the army opened up wasteland to plant crops.

Wang Erguang's home is here too, but he had passed away. Despite all his trials and tribulations, he lived merrily to the ripe old age of 90.

His son, Wang Xi'an, is an introvert. Old Ren said that he is a farmer-poet and his stories have appeared in the newspaper. Wang Xi'an began

- 1 Residents in the Taihang Mountains live a simple life, and they are very hospitable. (By Wang Shuzhou)
- 2 Shibanyan Township is noted for its stone houses. Even the roofs are made of stone. (By Huang Yanhong)
- 3 Yi Meihua has retired and now lives at Shibanyan Town. (By Huang Yanhong)
- 4 An old picture of Yi Meihua as a delivery woman was featured at the exhibition "The Spirit of the Shoulder Pole". (By Huang Yanhong)



to write poems in 1998 when he found out that he had heart disease and needed to refrain from physical labour. As he hadn't much to do at home, he started to write. With only three years of schooling, he needed to look up the dictionary often to learn new words. He modestly admitted that he had little education and couldn't write good poems.

I read a few of his poems; all written on the back of his used calendars with a brush. His poems were all about the Taihang Mountains:

"Dates in July and pears in August, persimmons in September are red once ripe."

"Separated by rivers and mountains, we chat; hearing each other, but we can't meet till two days later." (Seeing the deep ravines and

About 60 years ago, a supply and marketing cooperative was set up in Shibanyan Village. It developed from two delivery persons to over 60, who carried everything on their shoulder poles to deliver daily necessities to about 10,000 people living in the 326 hamlets in the mountains. The cooperative became renowned throughout China and was awarded the honour of the "Banner in Rural China's Business Service".

The exhibition featured an old picture of a delivery woman who carried a basket on her back and held a rattle-drum in her hand. People said that she still lived in the village. So the next morning I went to visit her.

Yin Meihua, now 63, is retired. She spent most of her life in the mountains, working for the supply and marketing cooperative. Her father was the first director of the cooperative. She looks robust but has an open personality. She told me that when she started working, her monthly salary was just 18 yuan, but now she draws a 500 yuan pension each month.

She could never forget the day when her father passed away in January 1961. Cooperative staff carried him on shoulder poles to the county hospital as he was seriously ill. Halfway there, his condition suddenly deteriorated. Hugging her father, she cried. With his last gasp, he pointed at the shoulder poles on which he was carried, and

said, "Meihua, don't forget the shoulder pole. I'm dying; you must carry it for me from now on."

The first deliveryman to use the shoulder pole in the mountains was carried away on them. The mountain path on which he had walked thousands of times over a decade became his final route home.

In the spring of that year, Yin Meihua set off carrying the shoulder pole left by her father. She still remembers her first delivery. With a load of over 30 kg, she tried to climb a big slope to Jiangtan Village. After several failed attempts, she finally reached the top. She recalled how every

day, she walked on the narrow mountain path carrying the loaded shoulder pole to one village after another in the eastern and western mountains and Taohua (Peach Flower) Cave. The most difficult obstacle was the river. There were few bridges then, so she had to roll up her pants and waded through the water in summer and walked on the slippery ice in winter. As the loaded shoulder pole was difficult to carry in the mountains, she replaced it with a basket. The picture was taken when she went up to the mountains on a routine delivery.

Walking out of Yin Meihua's home, I saw endless cars passing by the many hotels along the street in Shibanyan Village. Today, with roads leading to Wangxiangyan and Taohua Valley, the shoulder pole has passed into history.



valleys, you know that it's not an exaggeration.)

"Old Wang is 51, with neither good nor bad luck. In July this year, a big boar came. It made havoc in the field. With ears as big as dustpans, that can blow up a strong wind." (This was written in the autumn of 1999 when he returned home after chasing wild boars in the mountains.)

### Shouldering History

Shibanyan (Stone Slab Crag) Village is located in the valley of Linlu Mountain. It has become a tourist attraction because of Wangxiangyan (the King and Prime Minister's Crag).

I went to see "The Spirit of the Shoulder Pole" exhibition in the supply and marketing cooperative in the evening.

Situated deep in the Taihang Mountains, Shibanyan Village is surrounded by perilous valleys and mountains that are very difficult to traverse. It used to take a Herculean effort to buy daily necessities from the county town or Yaocun Village, passing through the Luban Ravine, making 70 uphill turns and 100 downhill turns. This is described in a folk song which goes, "It is so difficult to buy, to sell and to walk; To get salt and oil you have to go over the mountains. Setting out before dawn in pitch darkness, you return when the stars are hanging in the sky."



照片 尹梅花







# The River in Heaven

Photos & Article by Shi Baoxiu

*"One can persevere through years of hard work,  
but how can one endure a lifetime of hardship?"  
— Folk lore of Linzhou people*



**T**he Hongqi (Red Flag) Canal in Linzhou, Henan Province — known as the River in Heaven — was built on sheer cliffs by Linzhou people. These people suffered unimaginable hardships from building this almost 2,000-km canal more than 40 years ago. The construction lasted ten years at the cost of about a hundred lives, cutting through more than a thousand mountain tops, with about 150 aqueducts and more than 200 tunnels. The water of the canal comes from the Zhanghe River of Pingshun County, Shanxi Province, and the irrigation channel winds for 4,000 km.

The Linzhou people used to suffer heavily from drought for a long time, but the canal brought water along. Since then, they have gradually shaken off poverty and now live more comfortably.

The people of Linzhou did not expect the Red Flag Canal would become a tourist attraction decades later. Visitors come from around the world to see the manmade river out of admiration and curiosity.

This engineering feat moves all who see it, as it winds through perilous peaks and passes sheer cliffs.

## Cutting Through the Taihang Mountains

The first time I visited the Red Flag Canal was in the summer of 2000.

I walked on the bank of the canal within the boundary of the Shanxi Province, which was shaded by the trees from the scorching July sun.

It seemed that the twisting canal was endless. When I looked down I could see sheer precipices and overhanging rocks. I dared not look to the horizon for more than one minute for fear of falling into the canal because the width of the bank is less than one metre. I could only imagine how difficult it was for the people of Linzhou to build this hanging canal. I met a villager of Shanxi on the bank so we sat down and talked about the building of the canal.

He said, "I'm from Niuling Village and 66 years old now. I was just 17 when the construction began on the Red Flag Canal. I looked after sheep everyday in the mountains at that time so I saw the Linzhou people digging the canal. People of our village usually cut firewood and picked herbs on the sheer cliffs, which we thought was hard work. So one can image how hard it was to punch holes, blast through the mountains, move rocks and stones halfway up a mountain days and nights. Later on, the clinics, schools, supply and marketing cooperatives and other departments also worked there."

After a while I went down the canal and arrived at the "Youth Tunnel" on the boundary of Henan Province. It was very hot walking on the road in the midsummer. As soon as I entered the tunnel I felt cool and comfortable, just like in the autumn.

A path was built along the sheer cliff of the "Small Grimace" peak where the builders once lived. I climbed it with trembling legs and as I glanced at the deep valley below I was so frightened that I clung to the iron chain tightly.

The canal here, much higher than the section in Shanxi Province, appears to be hanging in mid-air. Dense trees have been planted on the one side of the bank. Without the trees people would be too scared to move on the bank for fear of falling off the cliffs. During the development of the tourist area, they planted cypresses and other trees to keep the cliffs out of sight.



1. The Red Flag Canal in Linzhou is known as the River in Heaven, because it is constructed above the highway.
2. Ren Yangcheng (left) and his team member were the explosive experts during the construction.
3. The "Eagle-Beak Cliff" was where the Blasting Team worked during the 1960s. (By Wei Dezhong)
4. The Red Flag Canal and its surrounding area have become a tourist attraction, and visitors come here out of admiration and curiosity.



# The River in Heaven



In addition, steady railings, higher than the waist, have been erected on both sides of the one-metre wide banks as extra safety precaution.

Walking on the bank, I saw the breathtaking peaks such as "Scaring Away the Ghost Peak" and "Eagle-Beak Cliff". Rocky peaks thrust towards the sky while the canal winds around the rocky peaks.

On the bank, I met Ren Yangcheng, who had been an explosive expert during the construction.

He was 70 years old, thin and small, with a straight back and bright eyes. "I was 27 years old when I became the head of the Blasting Team in the building of the Nangudong Reservoir in 1958. When I received the order to "divert water from the Zhanghe River to Linxian County" in early 1960s, I led a dozen blasters to the worksite in Shanxi, the head of the canal. I once ignited 1,800 kg of dynamite, and it levelled the hilltop as soon as the rumbling noise was heard."

## When Each Day May Be My Last

Ren Yangcheng led a group of capable and brave young men in removing rocks from the faces of steep cliffs, a highly dangerous job.

"At the beginning I worked at the most dangerous sites alone since the others were afraid. I got blisters on my legs and waist after days of removing rocks hanging in midair. Eventually, the blisters turned into scars and callus. Once the party secretary came to the worksite to visit me, he went up to me trying to untie the ropes on my waist. I dodged away and untied it myself. He looked beneath my clothes and then he quickly turned his head away with tears. He said, 'It is really hard for

you, really too hard. You have guts. As soon as the construction is completed, I will invite you, Yangcheng, to the county town to rest in bed for a whole week, watching movies or operas and feeding you with the best steamed bread and meat.' I told him that I did not know if I would live that long because each day may be my last. But he assured me, 'No problem, no problem so long as you are

careful."

## Lucky to Be Alive

I met another member of the Blasting Team. A skinny 63-year-old, he owned a field which his son helped managing, and he and his wife had a small business of selling fried dough. They worked for

about two or three hours every morning and made more than a hundred yuan each month to cover the household expenses.

He was just 20 when he joined the construction of the Red Flag Canal. The old man showed me the scars on his shin, shoulders, back and waist and told me that a delayed explosion seriously injured him.

"I was thrown down by a strong blast and lost consciousness immediately. When I came to, doctors of the worksite were picking out broken stones from deep inside my flesh. I was trembling and sweating with pain and my colleagues put a towel into my mouth so I could bite down and bear the pain. The doctors covered my legs with a piece of cloth all the time because one leg was broken by a flying stone and the bone was visible. I suffered a lot, but compared with those who died during the building of the canal, I feel very lucky to have a chance to live a comfortable life now."

## A Celebration of Noise

I went to Panyang Village to visit former builders of the Red Flag Canal. All were in their 60s or 70s. Some were taking care of their grandchildren, some playing chess and the others chatting. Then I met



1. The irrigation channel of Gaisang Township is all made of stone.
2. The people of Linzhou built the irrigation channel in 1966. (By Wei Dezhong)
3. The water reservoir of Linzhou.
4. The Linzhou people suffered much from the construction of the canal before, but they can now reap their rewards.



a neatly dressed elder in front of a gate who was thin, but had sparkling eyes and a fair complexion. He told me that he was also a builder of the Red Flag Canal.

"My name is Lu Zihui, from Linzhou City, and I am the former head of the Department of Water Resources of Linxian County. I have often returned to visit Panyang, my hometown, since my retirement. When I was just 25 or 26 years old, I started work as the deputy head of the General Office of the Headquarters of Water Diversion from the Zhanghe River to Linxian County in charge of recording major events."

He told me how the blasting at the head of the canal had caused a great commotion and curiosity among the people at the junction of the three provinces of Shanxi, Hebei and Henan. "The excited people of Hebei watched the blasting from the north bank of the Zhanghe River and people of Shanxi looked down from the Taihang Mountains, while the people of Henan, who were building the Red Flag Canal, waited anxiously on the river bank. There were so many people from near and far rushed to watch the blasting, even the opera troupes performed here when they heard the news.

"The blasting resounded like thunder and made the cliffs of the Taihang Mountains collapse instantly. Colourful smoke rose up, mixed with the dust of the yellow soil, red sandstones, grey limestone and black coal."

A poem was written at that time to describe the scene of the

blasting: "Smoke rises, making the sky dark, rolling stones make the river churn, the sound of the blasting makes the cliff fall, the unfolding red flag causes loud laughter. The people are optimistic. Splitting the Taihang Mountains with our hands, bringing the water of the Zhanghe River to Linxian County."

### Too Busy for Love

I went to Caisang Town with Wei Dezhong, a senior reporter of





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Henan Daily, to look for the "iron girls". We took out some pictures, taken by Wei Dezhong about 40 years ago, and show them to a group of old women age around 50 or 60. They were excited to see the pictures though some of them were difficult to recognize because they were taken from the side or back. They looked at them carefully and one said, "Look, this is me." Another

said, "I worked like that back then, holding a drill in each hand." A third one said, "We have all gotten old and some of the girls in these pictures can not be easily recognized." Then Wei told me in a low voice that he still had a front view group photo of the "iron girls". I knew he wanted to show it to them, but he feared that it would interrupt their recollections of the past.

We sat down and talked. Cui Meiying, the head of the "Iron Girls" Company, said, "Most of us were just 16 or 17 and the eldest were only

20 in 1962. We carried big baskets of stones with shoulder poles and iron chains from the day we arrived at the site and worked like that for more than a year. The food, such as leaves of sweet potatoes cooked with noodles made of coarse grain, was not so good but we had enough to eat."

When I asked about boyfriends, Sun Chunying replied, "We did not have boyfriends at that time. It was not that we did not want to, but we did not have time to think about it. We got up at four or five in the morning every day, and rushed to the worksite with drills and hammers. We even did not have time to comb our hair or wash our faces sometimes. We had lunch at the worksite and after a short rest we started to work again. When the work was over it was already dark. After supper we had meetings till nine or ten at night. Back at our quarters, we washed faces and feet and then fell sound sleep as soon as our heads hit the pillow. So you see, how could we have time to look for boyfriends?"

Hao Gaixiu recalled, "It was impossible to make appointments at night even when we had no meetings. As soon as the lights were out, we had to blow out the lamps. And the local people living at the foot of the mountains told us that tigers often came down the mountains at

1. Looking for the "iron girls" at the Ren Township.
2. One of the youngest "iron girls" is already in her fifties.
3. The glorious days of the "iron girls". (By Wei Dezhong)
4. The suspension bridge across the Red Flag Canal.



night to look for water near our work shed, so we shouldn't go out alone after dark. If one of us wanted to go to the lavatory at night, we would have co-workers to accompany each other."

### Lessons of Life

The mountain wind made the summer evening as cool as autumn. I was chatting with Hao Shuncaï, an official from the Red Flag Administrative Department, by a stone table in the Youth Tunnel Hotel. Hao Shuncaï, about 50, was a writer. It was he who wrote the song "The Spirit of the Red Flag Canal Will Be Passed from Generation to Generation". His recollections of the Red Flag Canal construction took me back 40 years.

"I was just 15 and was in junior middle school when the Red Flag Canal was started in 1960. The slogan of that time was 'Workers, peasants, businessmen, students and soldiers will all go to build the Red Flag Canal'. So we also took part in the building of the canal, but we still had classes every two days on the worksites with blackboards hanging on the trees and students sitting on the rocks. We also had classes at the nearby school on Sundays, so we could sit at benches to do our homework comfortably.

"That year the construction team of our village worked on the hollow dam site at Baijiazhuang Village. The hollow dam allowed the water of the canal to flow through the dam while the water of the river ran over the top. We students would transport sand in carts. It took five students to pull a cart, one pulling from between the shafts and one with a short rope and one with a long rope on each side. The second job for students was to record work points for the builders, who carried stones from the foot of the mountain to the worksite. Our other job was picking wild herbs on the mountains, which we enjoyed because

we could run freely on the mountains. We also had to pick two sacks of wild herbs and vegetable a day, one for the morning and one for the afternoon."

### Hunger in the Hills

While we were eating in Linzhou Hotel, Ren Yangcheng recalled the hard times when they did not have enough to eat. Pointing at the roasted butterfish on bamboo strips he said, "During those years we had never had this, not even in our dreams. The only things we ate at that time were coarse grain, wild herbs and tree leaves. I remember that in June 1960, it was already summer, but the trees, about two kilometres around the canal, still looked bare in winter because as soon as the leaves sprouted they were picked by hungry people. No matter what leaves or wild herbs there were, if they were not too bitter, people would eat them, except pine, cypress, willow, poplar, and pagoda tree leaves. People even thought that the mulberry and elm leaves were as delicious as meat, and people were eager to try things that they had never had before."

### Fighting Fear

Hao Shuncaï remembered how the enthusiasm of some was affected by the hardship of the work and life. The cadres were usually fine, but many other people were worried. When the construction of the canal started, some thought they were building a route for the preparation of war instead of a canal for water diversion. They thought that if war was launched by the US or Soviet Union, the Chinese armies could transport arms and ammunition stealthily through the canal.

But they were finally calmed when the canal was completed and the water flowed down to Linxian County.

The Red Flag Canal played an important role during the 1970s,

channeling more than 400 million m<sup>3</sup> of water each year to irrigate the fields. At that time there was sufficient water in Shanxi Province. Later the canal started leaking because it was built with a lime-and-mud mortar that could not withstand the flow pressure. Then the canal was laid again with cement mortar.

People of Linxian County are renowned for their diligent and tough characters. With water to irrigate the farmland, their grain yield increased from





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2 kg/ha to more than 26 kg/ha, raising their living standard considerably.

Today Linzhou people remember the martyrs who died during the building of the Red Flag Canal and the other heroes who made great contributions to the building of the canal. The Red Flag Canal symbolizes the unyielding character of the Linzhou people who mastered their own destiny.

Later, I visited Yang Gui in his home in Jinsong residential area, Beijing. He is 73 this year, but had just turned 30 when he led the Linzhou people to build the Red Flag Canal. His wife died recently so the big house looks quiet and empty. He said that he would have declined an interview if I had not mentioned on the phone that my hometown was Shijiahe, Linxian County. He had felt lonely since his wife passed away and wanted to recall the people and events of the past — his wife, fellow villagers, and the Red Flag Canal.

## A Lifetime's Work

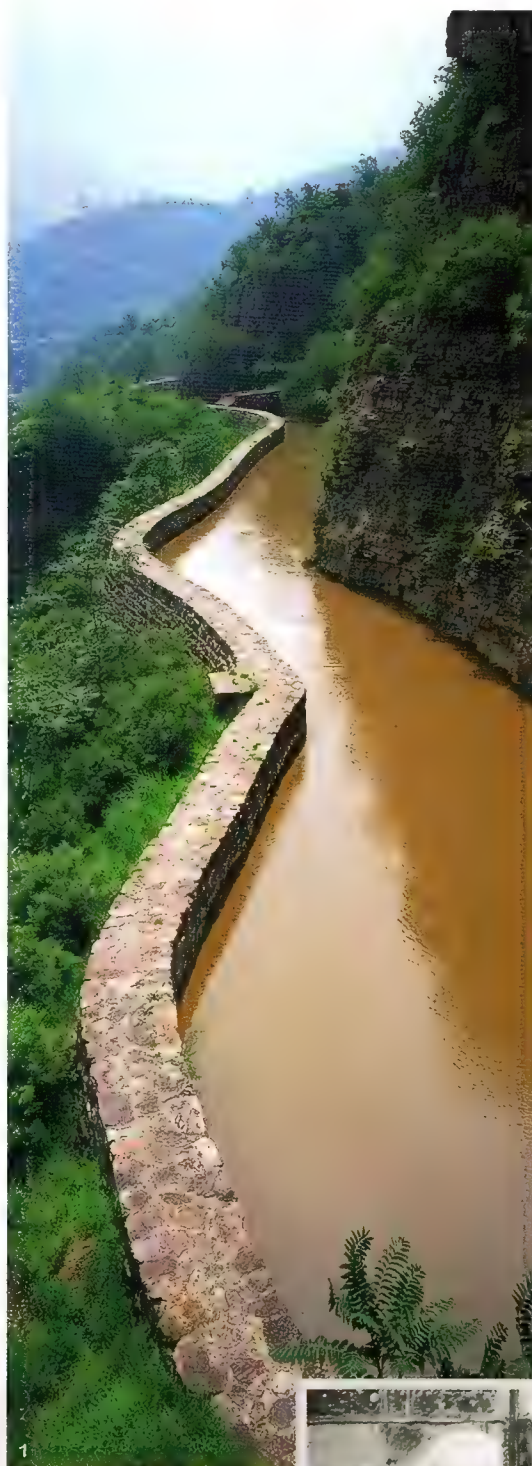
Yang Gui said, "I was born in a mountain village in Qixian County, Xinxiang District, Henan, about 15 km from Linxian County. My village, in the Taihang Mountains area, was short of water too. I remembered carrying water over long distances when I was about ten years old. When I was older, I joined the armed working team and waged guerrilla warfare against the Japanese aggressors in the Taihang Mountains area. I understood how local people suffered from the lack of water. In 1954, I went to work in Linxian County where I saw how people suffered even more from the shortage of water than the other counties around. The villagers only washed their faces for celebrations or when visiting relatives, and they washed with only a small bowl of water. The wheat yield was about a 7 kg/ha at that time.

"I was involved in the construction of the Democratic Canal in my

hometown around 1952. When that canal was completed the crop yield, even in low-yield plots, doubled. From then on I knew that water was the lifeblood of agriculture. First I asked the villagers to dig water-retention wells in their courtyards so that they could save some water from the rain for cooking. Several reservoirs were built in the mountainous area of Linxian County in 1958. But the reservoirs could not store enough to get through the frequent droughts. In 1959, Linxian suffered a serious drought and all the reservoirs dried up.

"I made up my mind to look for an adequate water supply. After experiencing all kinds of hardships we finally found the ideal water source in the upper reaches of Zhanghe River. Then it was a decade of hard work to build the canal, from February 1960 to 1971. At the beginning we did not have enough food, clothes and materials, but the people of Linxian simply stuck it out by practising austerity. Then came the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution. I was persecuted and hunted by the Red Guards during that period. That's why the building of the canal took so long."

Yang Gui also said that he had received a call two days previously from a villager of Linxian County inviting him there. The villager said that they were living comfortably, enjoying food such as noodles, steamed bread, rice, fish and



1. The Red Flag Canal of Shanxi Province is blasted open with dynamite.
2. Yang Gui (left), the former party secretary who supervised the construction of Red Flag Canal, returned to Linzhou in 1991. (By Wei Dezhong)
3. Nowadays, the abundant Linzhou no longer suffers from droughts.



meat every day and harvested more than enough grain. Since his wife had died, he wanted to return home to enjoy a carefree life.

When you talk about the Red Flag Canal with people anywhere in Linzhou, whether in a remote mountainous area such as Shibanyan Township or on a busy city street, they will all mention Yang Gui. It has been 50 years since Yang Gui began to work in Linxian County, but he is still a hero to the Linxian people.

### Recording History

Wei Dezhong, a senior reporter at Henan Daily newspaper, said covering the stories of the Red Flag Canal was the most important assignment of his 40-year career.

"In February 1960, just after the Spring Festival, I went to Linxian County when the diversion project from Zhanghe River to Linxian County had just started. I thought this was worth reporting. I forged a solid bond with people of Linxian County and the Red Flag Canal. I came to the worksite two or three times every year, staying for ten days, half a month or even a month each time. I never missed an important project such as blasting in the mountains or a tunnel, or the construction of an aqueduct. I really felt that the building of the Red Flag Canal would be an important chapter in the history of China. At first I thought it would take two years, but the political turmoil made

the project last ten years.

"I always went to the worksites on foot because the county had only three jeeps and there was no highway to mention. Although it needed a week to see all the worksites in the county, I was afraid of becoming privileged. Compared with people working on the canal, I had an easy job. I did not want to hold up their schedule since they were short of labourers. It was a common then to put the general interest above all else.

"I had climbed all the mountains of the Red Flag worksites from Shanxi to Linxian County, Henan. Yang Gui once said that the leaders of Linxian County did not even climb as many mountains as I did. Yang Gui always accompanied me to the worksites to look for stories when he had time. A lot of information on people and events came from him.

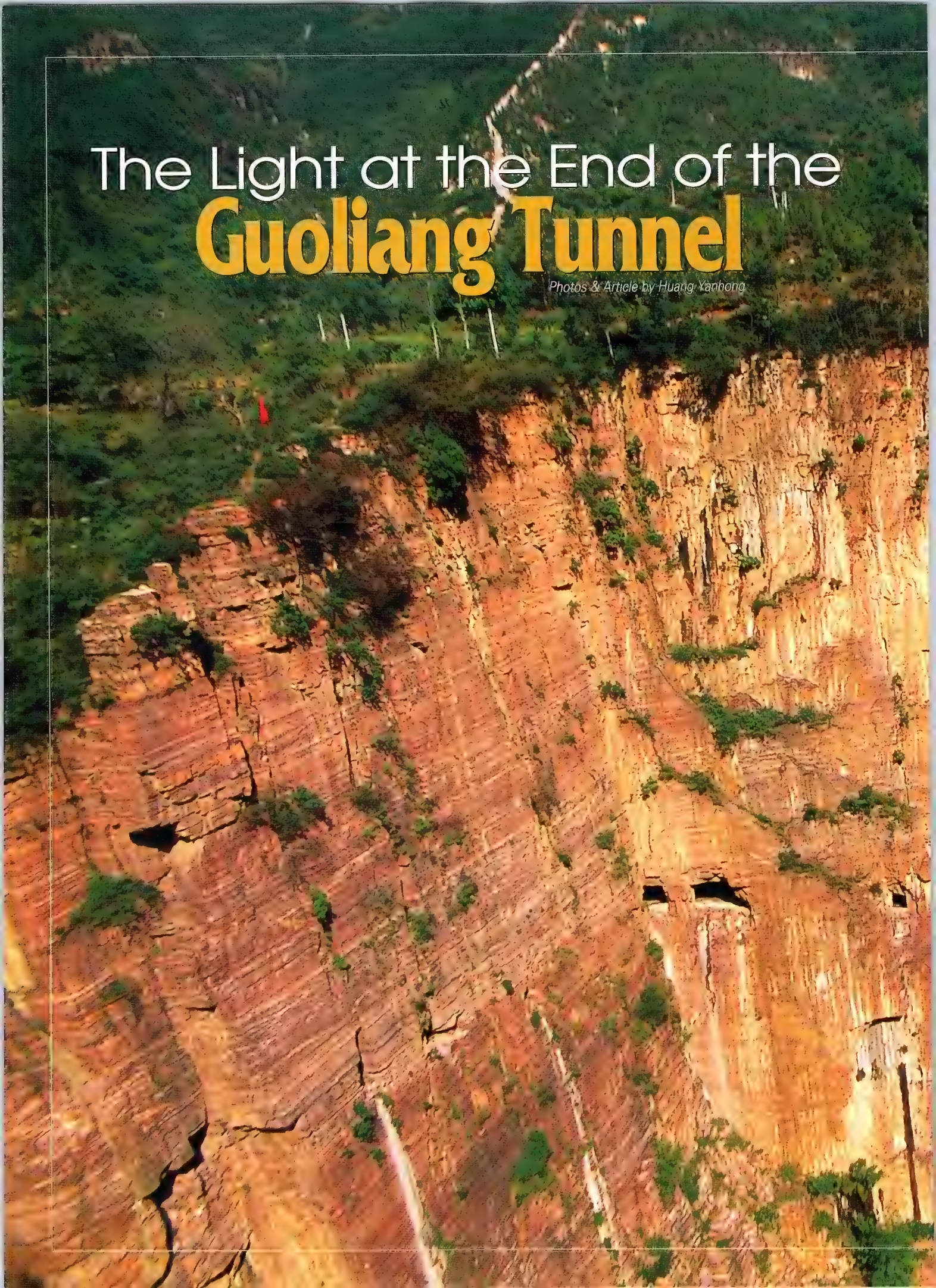
"In the 40 years of my career, the ten years covering the Red Flag Canal is the most valuable though it was hard and difficult. I was fortunate to have the chance to report on the people of Linxian whose extraordinary feat pulled them out of poverty. With so many pictures of the Red Flag Canal, I feel my life was well spent on something important. These pictures are my treasures. I think that as a reporter, I have done what I was supposed to do."



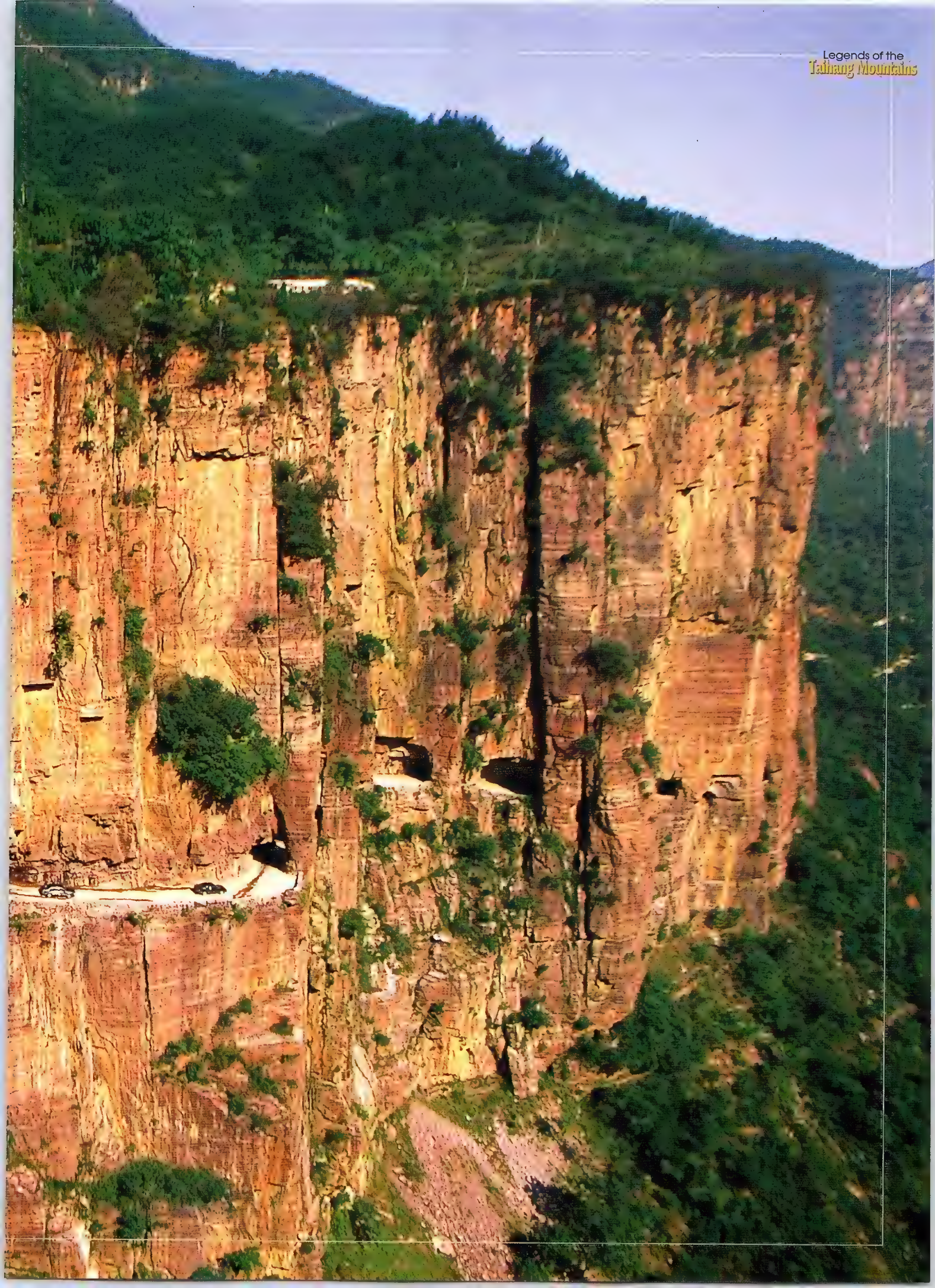


# The Light at the End of the **Guoliang Tunnel**

*Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong*









# The Light at the End of the Guoliang Tunnel

**D**riving along the winding mountain road, I arrived at the famous Guoliang Tunnel near Shayao Township of Huixian County.

Guoliang Tunnel is different from other road tunnels; it is quiet, secluded and mysterious, bright one minute and dim the next, full of twists and turns. The wall of the tunnel is uneven and there are more than 30 "windows" of different sizes and shapes. Some windows are round and some are square, and they range from dozens of metres long to standard-window-size. It is frightening to look down from the windows, where strange rocks hanging from the sheer cliff above and a seemingly bottomless pit lying below. A village, opposite the tunnel, appears to hang on the precipice. Walking through the twisted tunnel is like walking through a labyrinth as the window light mingles with the shadows inside the tunnel. As I walked, a beam of dazzling light would occasionally shoot into the corner and then the sound of a motor would come from behind.

Looking from the opposite mountain, Guoliang Tunnel looks like a corridor in the cliff-face.

## A Tunnel to the Outside World

Guoliang Village was almost cut off from its surrounding towns and villages before the construction of the tunnel. A ladder near Huitao Village was the only route in and out of the village. Shen Mingxin, a party secretary of the village, the only person in the village who had experienced the city life first led the villagers to build a road in 1972. The most difficult section was the 1,300 m tunnel in the mountain east of the Guoliang Gorge where the rock was very hard. The limited space could only allow six workers; therefore, there were 13 people worked day and night in two groups. One group held the rock chisel while the others hammered. Over six years, 4,000 eight-pound hammers were broken and 12 tons of chisels used.

Today only four of the 13 people are still alive. Shen Mingyan, 76, is the eldest. He recalled the very hard times of digging the tunnel. They ate together at the worksite and received a food allowance of 15 cents each day per person. Despite the harsh work condition, they only had

thick corn porridge once a day.

The death of Wang Huaitang, one of his partners, is imprinted in his memory. Wang had gone to the worksite earlier than the others and started to clear the broken rock from the previous day. When the others arrived, he was straining to lift a big piece of rock. Before they could help they heard a rumbling. Wang plunged off the 100-m cliff with the rock. It took two days to recover his body from the bottom of the valley.

The rest of the workers were so traumatised that the work had to stop for several months.

At the place where the accident happened, the cliffs are dangerously steep. Motorists now salute the builders of the tunnel by sounding their horns lightly there.

In 1974, Guoliang Tunnel was opened, but at that time only two or three people could pass through it. From then on more villagers joined in the work. The head of the villagers told me that about 80% of the elderly people had taken part in building the tunnel. At the same time more than 100 people from the Cultural and Educational Department of Huixian County came to help. In 1977, Guoliang Tunnel finally opened to traffic.

## A Village Born of War

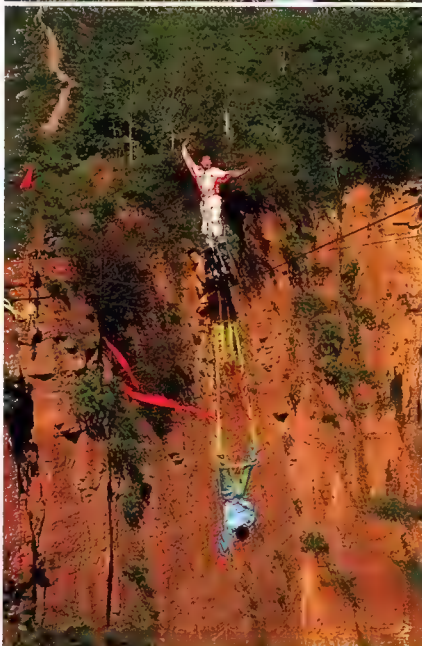
Emerging from the Guoliang Tunnel and continuing uphill you see a picturesque village.

The village was named after Guoliang, a leader of the peasant uprising at the end of Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - 24 AD). He led the local peasants to fight against the rotting monarchs along the Taihang Mountains. The rebels, hopelessly outnumbered, retreated from Huitao Village, very close to Guoliang Village. The head of the village took me to Huitao Village and told me that there was once an old oak tree in the village. In order to

mislead the enemy, Guoliang hung a sheep on the tree and put a drum under it. The struggling sheep beat the drum with its feet, fooling the enemy into thinking they were preparing to attack. As the sheep slowly died, the beating of the drum stopped. Only at that time did the enemies find out that they were being deceived.

An elderly man told me that Guoliang fled to Shanxi where he died. Now Shanxi also has a village named after him.

It is strange that most of families in the village have the surname



Previous Page: Guoliang Village in Huixian.

1. Guoliang Village is a resort for outdoor painting.
2. Acrobatic performance often takes place in the valley just outside of Guoliang Cave.
3. Many homes have become art centres, as well as photography and creative art schools.
4. Guoliang Cave was dug completely by the villagers themselves.



Shen rather than Guo. It is generally believed that the ancestors of the Shen family used to be a wealthy and influential family in Nanjing (the former capital) but they ended up being exiled to the border area. While they were passing through Shanxi some of the family members fled to the Taihang Mountains.

### The Heavenly Ladder is near Huitao Village

The Heavenly Ladder was on a precipitous cliff and I walked for some distance on a 60-cm-wide road that grew more dangerous as it went down. I learned how hard life had been for generations before. The head of the village said it had been the only route for villagers to get down the mountains before the tunnel was dug, and it would take three hours to reach the township. The weight of pigs raised by the villagers never exceeded 50 kg because it was impossible to transport them to the markets if they were too heavy.

### A Big Screen Backdrop

Zhao, a teacher from the primary school of Shayao Township, came climbing up the Heavenly Ladder, struggling with luggage on his back.

Zhao lived in Huitao Village where there were about 20 families.

But why did he keep climbing the ladder? He told us that he had to walk about four kilometres more to his home if he did not take the Heavenly Ladder.

Zhao, 57, has taught at the school for 38 years. More than 600 students passed through his care, many leaving to study at university or to work elsewhere in the country.

He used to be the only teacher in Huitao primary school, and had to teach five different grades. But he had as few as five students at one time. However, since the merging of the three schools from nearby villages, students boarded at the school could only go home at weekends. As a result, Zhao had to walk to the school from the mountain village.

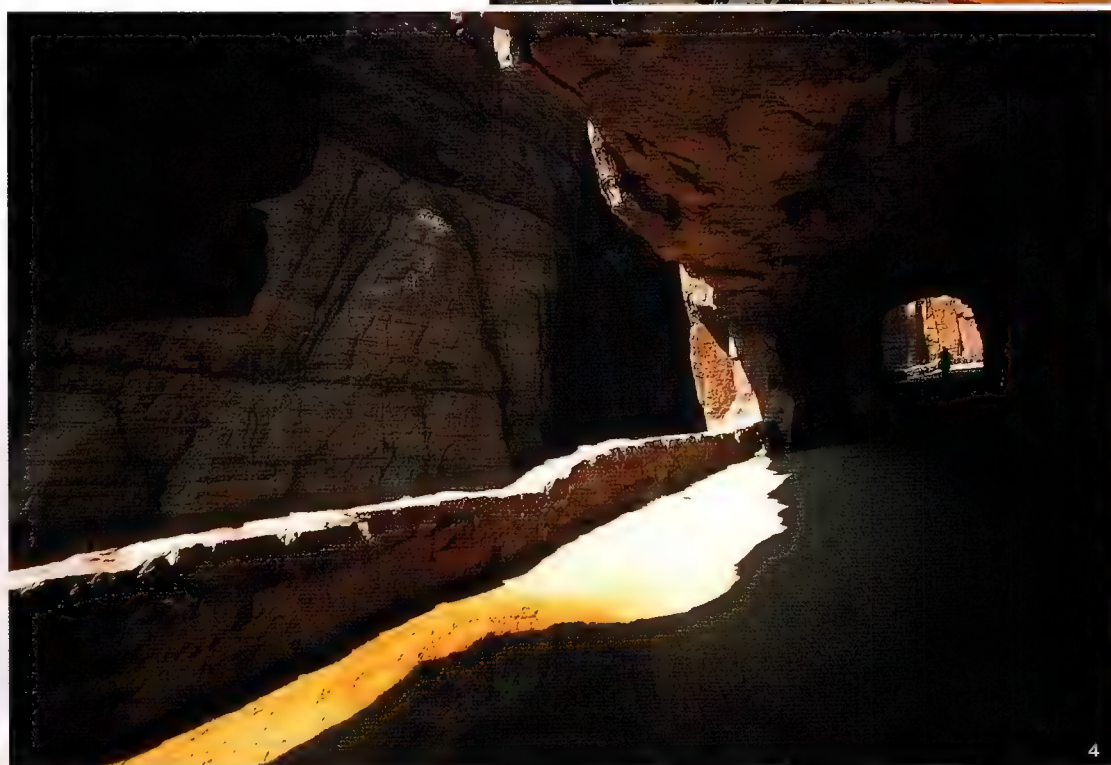
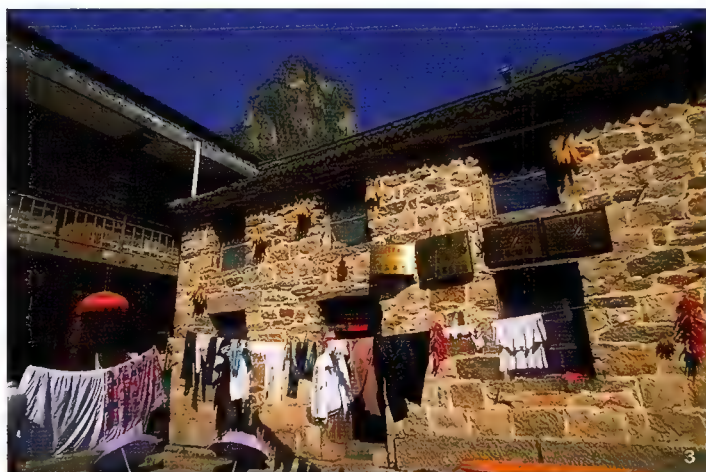
We met Zheng Baoguo in Guoliang Village who works in the Federation of Literary and Art Circles of Huixian County. He is a frequent guest of the village. In 1990,

it was Zheng who led film director Xie Jin to the village. At that time Xie was looking for a place to shoot the movie "The Sound of the Bell in Qingliang Temple". He was convinced it was the right location as soon as he entered the Guoliang Tunnel.

The film crew scouted round for accommodation. From Li Zhangsuo's house, they saw the snow-covered mountains. Xie decided to stay in that house there and then. He has returned to the house three times and he even stayed for 50 days the last time.

Li Zhangsuo and his wife thought that it was an honour to have Xie living in their house; so they kept the room just as the famous director had left it and put a sign saying "Xie Jin's residence" on the door.

Guoliang Village has become a familiar sight in Chinese films since then. About 40 movies and television plays have been made here in the last ten years.





# Taihang Mountains

## Travel Tips

### To Henan:

Flights to Zhengzhou, capital of Henan Province, are available from over 40 Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Guilin, Haikou, Hangzhou, Kunming and Qingdao. China Southern Airlines and Hainan Airlines provide daily services between Shenzhen and Zhengzhou. A single fare costs about US \$70.

### To Zhengzhou:

**Transport:** Xinzheng International Airport is located south of downtown Zhengzhou. You may take a taxi from the airport to downtown area. Taxis charge a minimum of ¥7 and it costs ¥1.2 per kilometre. The Zhengzhou Railway Station is situated in the downtown area. Train services link Zhengzhou to

Tel: (0371) 5959 988  
Website: www.hthotel.com.cn

### Yuyan Hotel (three star)

Address: 15 northern side of Jingsan Road, Zhengzhou City. Tel: (0371) 5951 166  
Website: www.yuyanhotel.com

### Admission, Accommodation and Transport at Scenic Spots:

#### Linlu Mountain (Taihang Grand Canyon, Hongqi Canal)

**Admission:** Taihang Grand Canyon: 50 km from Anyang City, it comprises of three scenic spots — Wangxiangyan, Peach Flower Valley and Taiji Mountain. Admission: ¥20 each; a through ticket for all the three sites ¥36.

Hongqi Canal: Admission to Qingnian Cave ¥25, and to the Hongqi Canal Memorial Hall ¥10.

Tel: (0372) 6040 080, 6048 003

**Accommodation:** Shibanyan Township: Wangxiangyan Hotel, ¥20/bed, ¥60/standard room;

charge from the entrance to Laoye Peak: ¥3; gondola service charge at Laoye Peak: ¥15 single, or ¥25 return.  
**Accommodation:** Huilong Village Inn, ¥15/bed.

#### Guanshan Mountain

**Admission:** The area is now under development, so admission is free for the time being.

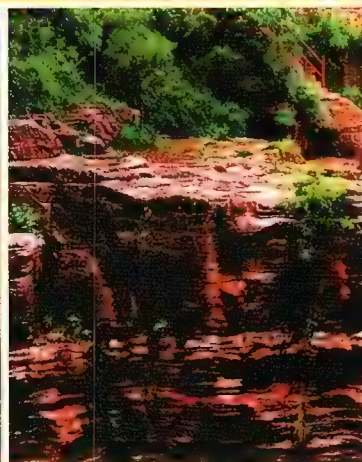
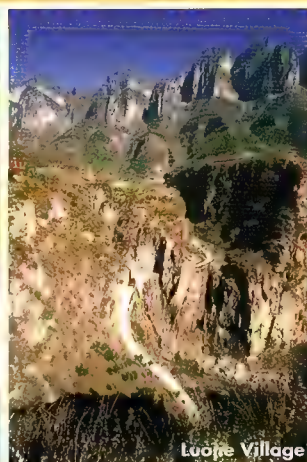
**Transport:** A shuttle bus service is available between Huixian County and Matoukou Village at the foot of Guanshan Mountain. Tourists are advised to contact the Matoukou Village committee to rent a car and to hire a guide before going up the mountain. It is very difficult for tourists to drive up the mountain themselves, and it is easy to get lost.

**Accommodation:** Matoukou Village Inns, ¥10/bed.

#### Wanxian Mountain (Guoliang Village, Nanping Village and Luoje Village)

**Admission:** ¥35 (half-price for students and the disabled)

**Transport:** It is 70 km from Xinxiang to the entrance of the Wanxian Mountain Scenic Area. A daily tourist



many other cities such as Anyang, Linzhou, Hebi, Puyang, Xinxiang, Jiyuan and Jiaozuo.

Information lines: (0371) 8351 222, 8352 222.

Tickets: (0371) 6988 988 (operator), (0371) 95001 88988 (automatic).

Zhongyuan Railway Passenger Transportation website: <http://railwayonline.ha.cn>.

Zhengzhou North Bus Station offers regular bus services to the above-mentioned cities.

Address: North end of Huayuan Road, Zhengzhou City. Tel: (0371) 5958 861.

### Accommodation:

#### Sofitel Zhengzhou (five-star)

Address: 289 Chengdong Road, Zhengzhou.

Tel: (0371) 5950 088

Website: www.accorhotels-asia.com

#### Weilai Conifer Zhengzhou (four-star)

Address: 69 Weilai Avenue, Zhengzhou City.

Tel: (0371) 5612 288

Website: www.weilaiconiferhotel.com

#### Haitian Hotel (three star)

Address: 288 Chengdong Road, Zhengzhou City.

Yunhai Holiday Inn, ¥90/standard room.

Linzhou: Linzhou Hotel, ¥200/standard room.

Anyang: Ancai Hotel, ¥458/standard room.

### Tours:

**Hongqi Canal One Day Excursion:** Located in the north of downtown Linzhou, the canal is 40 km long, comprising three scenic attractions of Water Divide Park, Luosi Pool and Qingnian Cave. Luncheon at Qingnian Cave.

**Grand Canyon One Day Excursion:** The tour runs 20 km from downtown Anyang to Shibanyan, 3 km from Shibanyan township to Wangxiangyan, and 5 km from Shibanyan to Peach Flower Valley. Leaving downtown in the morning for Wangxiangyan and returning to Shibanyan township at noon to visit the Memorial Hall of Shoulder Pole Spirit; visit Peach Flower Valley in the afternoon, or leave Shibanyan to tour Taihang Pinghu Lake.

### Huilong

**Admission:** ¥35.

**Transport:** Shuttle buses are available between Huixian County and Huilong. Tourist bus services

bus service is available. Huixian county seat is 50 km from the scenic area, and tourist buses run directly to the scenic area every day.

**Accommodation:** Most of the hotels and inns within the scenic area are run by local families. They are clean and under standardized management. Generally they charge ¥10/person. In Guoliang Village, each family runs an inn, and they list out their telephone numbers, the names of the person in charge and the business license numbers. The price for a student is ¥12/day (including meals). The summer price is ¥15/person/day for less than 15 days, or ¥13/person/day for more than 15 days (including meals). The price for individual tourists is ¥20/person/day (including meals).

Tel: (0373) 6718 007, 6718 542

### Tour: (recommended three-day tour)

First day: Sun, Moon and Star Stones at Nanping → Black Dragon Pool Falls → White Dragon Pool Falls → Huanglong Cave → Wufeng Mountain Forests → Sword Sharpening Peak Falls

Second day: Guoliang Precipice Corridor → Hongyan



Grand Canyon → Heavenly Pool → Hanliu → Crying Spring → Honglong Cave → Bailong Cave → Ladder to Heaven

Third day: Qilang Peak → Spiders' Den → Sun Bin Spring → Yixiantian (Thread of Sky) → Mountain God's Whip → Luojie Village → Calabash Peak

### Yuntai Mountain

**Admission:** ¥80

**Transport:** Yuntai Mountain is 10 km from downtown Jiaozuo. Special tourist trains to the mountain are available at the Jiaozuo Railway Station. Shuttle buses to various scenic spots are also available at the front gate of the railway station, ¥8 return. The gondola up the mountain is ¥20.

**Accommodation:** Just inside the entrance of the scenic area is Anshang Village where there are more than 130 family inns. The rate is ¥10/bed or ¥80/standard room. The Yuntai Mountain Villa outside the scenic area charges ¥160/standard room.

**Website:** www.yuntaishan.net

Wangwu Mountain → Wulongkou

### Suggestion:

Visit the Linlu Mountain Grand Canyon and Hongqi Canal for two days, then leave Linzhou for Huixian County in Xinxiang. It takes three hours by car, longer by bus. From Huixian, you can go directly to the Luojie Village of Shayao Township (only one shuttle bus a day, departing in the morning) to the mountain; then visit Guoliang Village for a day (taking a bus from Shayao Township). Go down the mountain to Nanping, one day; return to Huixian and then to Huilong by bus, one day. Go to Guanshan Mountain, one day; to Jiaozuo, about two hours drive. The best scenery at Yuntai Mountain is Wenpan Valley, one day; then go to Jiyuan for Wangwu Mountain and Wulongkou. On the way you can visit the Jidu Temple, taking two days. Including getting there, the entire tour requires 12 to 15 days.

If your time is limited, you can select some of the attractions. For instance, a tour of some scenic spots

paths as they can be slippery.

In summer, especially in the rainy season, be aware of snakes. When walking in the thick grass, you can try stirring the grass in advance to scare them away.

The villagers in the mountain are very hospitable. There is no problem with finding food and lodgings, but you have to be prepared for simple meals and poor sanitation. Generally these rural homes have no bath or shower. Of course there are hotels with better facilities at the Grand Canyon and Guoliang Village.

Be sure to bring food and water with you before starting out each day as the villages can be a good distance apart.

Some mountains are very difficult to climb. On Luoie Village, for example, it took our reporter 50 minutes to reach the top. In addition, before climbing a mountain, you'd better take a first aid kit with you, for the mountains can be overgrown with brambles.



Yuntai Mountain



Taihang Mountains

**Tourist hotline:** (0391) 7709 001, 7709 300

### Wangwu Mountain

**Admission:** ¥35

**Transport:** Wangwu Mountain is more than 40 km from downtown Jiyuan City. Special tourist buses are available between the scenic area and Jiyuan. The gondola on the mountain charges ¥50 return.

Tel: (0391) 6733 358

### Wulongkou

**Admission:** ¥20

**Transport:** Take Bus No. 25 from downtown Jiyuan.

Tel: (0391) 6751 588

### Jidu Temple

**Admission:** ¥10

**Transport:** Take Bus No. 6 from downtown Jiyuan

Tel: (0391) 6697 270

### Independent Travel Schedule:

Zhengzhou → Linzhou → Linlu Mountain Grand Canyon → Hongqi Canal → Huixian County → Shayao township → Luoie Village → Guoliang Village → Nanping → Huilong → Guanshan Mountain → Jiaozuo → Yuntai Mountain → Jiyuan City →

in Huixian County requires 4 to 6 days, or a tour of the Linlu Mountain Grand Canyon and Hongqi Canal requires 3 to 4 days, according to your plan.

### Advise:

Except for some developed tourist areas such as Yuntai Mountain in Jiaozuo and Wangwu Mountain in Jiyuan, which provide relatively comfortable tours, most places in the Taihang Mountains are underdeveloped. A backpacker needs to be extra prepared.

Winter in the Taihang Mountains is very cold with temperatures dropping to -12°C. One needs to be fully equipped with suitable clothing, such as an overcoat made of Gortex material.

It snows in winter. Be careful while walking on mountain paths. You should also choose the right vehicle. For instance, it's better to take a jeep on the snow-covered roads, and remind the driver to carry snow chains. The concrete road to Luoie Village is narrow. It is very dangerous to drive on after snow.

In rainy June and July, remember to bring wet weather gear. Be careful when walking on mountain

### Buddha's Halo

Reporter Huang Yantong

The day I was to leave Guoliang Village, I got up early to watch sunrise.

At the mountain top, I saw a colourful ring of light appearing amid the clouds: Buddha's halo. Look, Buddha's halo! I cried out in excitement. The village head and another two tourists ran over. They'd never seen nor known "Buddha's halo". I asked them to stand with the sun behind them and look at the ring of light before them. Our shadows appeared in the ring of light. When we waved our hands, the shadows in the light ring did the same. The shadows changed size with the moving clouds. Later, local friends, including photographer Wang Shuzhou—who had photographed the mountain for nearly 30 years—called it a wonder.











# *Sleigh Ride Through a* **WINTER WONDERLAND**

*Photos & Article by Li Xuellang*

Lake Kanas is famous for its gorgeous autumnal scenery, making it a Mecca for landscape photographers. But few people see its beauty in winter. I visited the lake in the depths of cold weather when temperatures dropped to  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Huddled over on a sleigh, I was ready to embrace Kanas and its chilly charms.





**N**eedless to say, it's much more difficult to take photos of Lake Kanas in winter than in other seasons. I planned to drive from Burqin to Chonghur Township, from where I would ride a sleigh for 12 days to Kanas.

Since the bitterness of Kanas Lake's winter is notorious, I had made detailed preparations before I set off. With a padded hat and gloves, masks, sunglasses, woollen socks, fur boots and a military overcoat, I thought I was well protected from the cold. But I was wrong.

### **Cold Discomfort**

I did not feel cold when I drove to Chonghur Township; after all, I was in a car. However, as soon as I settled on the horse-drawn sleigh, the cold struck me to my bones. But because snow had blocked the road to the mountain, my choice of transport in the area was limited.

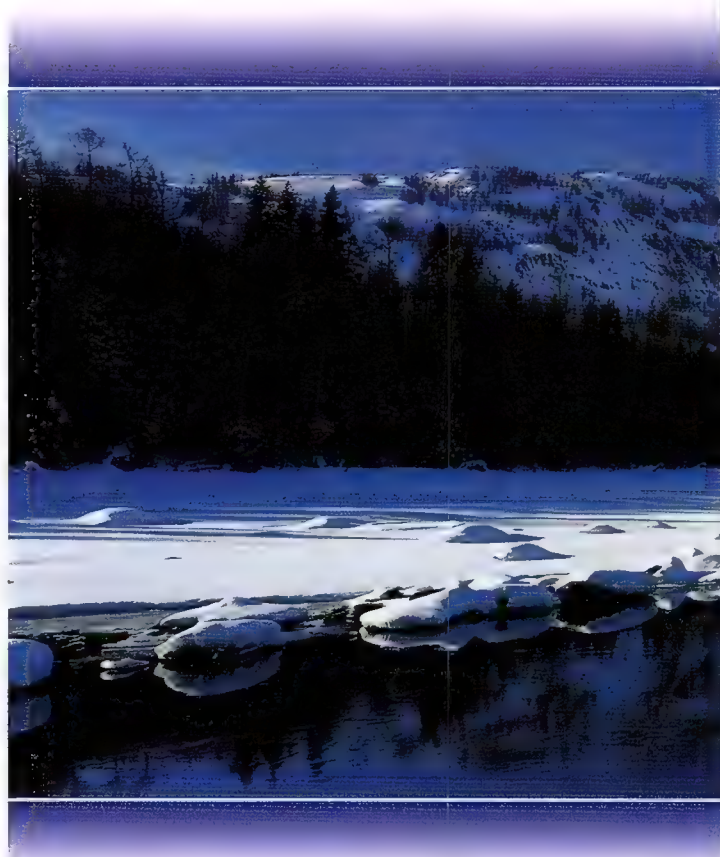
The sleigh was made of two logs and the seats had several wooden planks between them. The road had long been covered by deep snow. The sleigh glided on, crushing the snow beneath it. It was fun at first, but after less than half an hour, I was freezing. The biting wind attacked from all directions; my skin and muscles became literally frozen stiff. The vapour coming through my mouth mask immediately turned to frost on my eyelashes, which made my eyelids stick together

when I blinked. My eyebrows and beard were white with frost, turning me into a Santa Claus without the jolly red coat. My heavy clothes seemed to have become as thin as paper, and all my joints were iced up. I rolled up my body tightly. Even worse, the hard planks were not comfortable, so I had to change my position occasionally, from sitting to reclining, to crouching, to kneeling.... But still, my limbs stayed numb and my back ached.

We entered a narrow valley 39 km before Hemuhe. The road was steep; one side dropped over steep cliffs and the other was mountains. Sometimes, when the horse turned a corner, it felt as though the sleigh would plunge over the cliffs. I was worried sick. Fortunately, it swung back to the road. Before we set off, I had put on all the clothes I could find, but still, now it was so cold that I seemed to be wearing nothing. After we went through the valley, I found that my cold sweat from the frightening ride had formed an ice shell inside my underwear.

### **A Frosty Reception**

The first half of our journey was risky, but we finished safely. It was the section towards a forestry farm that nearly killed me. It was snowing lightly when we got on the road, but I paid no attention to the changing weather. All of a sudden, the flakes became bigger and thicker, and fell more heavily. In no time, visibility had reduced to only two metres, but the road was becoming increasingly steep. Seeing how hard the horses were working, I decided to get off the sleigh and walk a while. I jumped off the sleigh and immediately sank up to my





chest in the snow, thoroughly stuck. I returned to the sleigh, crouching. The cold made me sleepy, but the guide kept talking and reminding me to stay awake — otherwise, I might never wake up again. However our worst nightmare came true when the horse stopped, unable to move forward any more. It refused the guide's attempts to drive it on. I saw fear in the guide's eyes. The fact was that in this snowy wilderness, we would freeze to death in a few hours unless we could reach the next stop. We changed the horse and drove the new horse hard. Slowly, the hesitating horse began to move. After a while, the sleigh ran steadily, and our hearts lightened.

It is hard to imagine how people live in such tough conditions, but on the way, I saw many happy faces. Most of the residents in this area are Kazaks, one of the major minority ethnic groups in Xinjiang. Following their ancestors' footsteps, the Kazaks live a



nomadic life. Taking their tents and herds, they chase after the pastureland and move their homes to wherever they can graze their animals, travelling a certain route year after year. After selling their cattle and sheep in autumn, keeping a few to breed, the herdsmen return to their winter shelters in a silvery world, feeding the animals and waiting for the spring. We passed a typical winter shelter of a dozen or so households. Their wooden cottages and pens, sparsely scattered in the snow-blanketed land, created a charming



**Opening page: Hemuhe Township in silvery landscape.**

1. Horse-drawn sleigh is the only transport in the Kanas area in winter.
2. A Kazak girl who lives a nomadic life.
3. Winter shelters of the Kazaks.
4. Lake Kanas just before it freezes over.



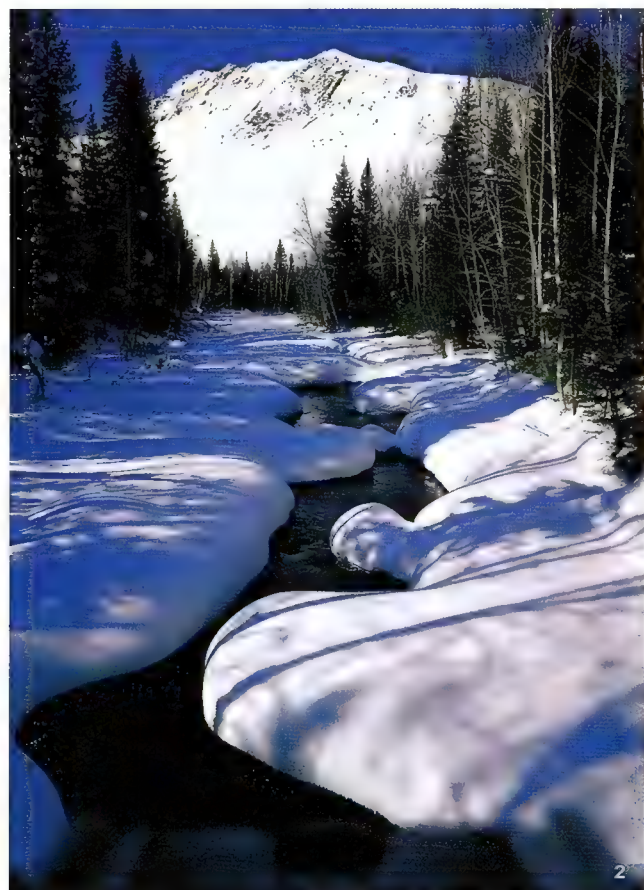


picture. In the bright moonlight, one might hear songs sung in natural, rustic voices from the cottages.

### The Season of Peace

This time, I saw a different picture of Hemuhe Township. In autumn, Hemuhe is a world of brilliant colours. Now, the overwhelming whiteness of snow presented a wonderland. Wherever I looked, I found picturesque landscapes as beautiful as those created in traditional Chinese paintings.

I clicked away on my camera as I roamed between Kanas' charming waters and mountains. There was a thick layer of ice on the lake. I walked on it and felt the water running quietly beneath. At the lake mouth, I saw water rushing out. The rising vapour immediately became frost on the trees, shining in the sun like crystal. Fog hovered in the forests, and the snow-capped rocks, big and small, looked like mushrooms. The Kanas in winter, clad in silver, appeared more peaceful and tranquil. The high



mountains covered in snow seemed to have become more imposing, with an air of mystery.

1. Lake Kanas veiled in the mysterious morning fog.
2. The ever-running water.

### Travel Tips

Lake Kanas is located in Burqin County of the Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang. The area has a long and cold winter and a short and mildly warm summer. The coldest month is January when the average temperature is  $-23^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The hottest month is July when temperature rises to  $20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . It usually begins to snow in September or October and the snowy season continues to April or May. July is the golden travel season, when the average temperature is  $14^{\circ}\text{C}$ , making Kanas a wonderful summer resort. It is very difficult to visit Lake Kanas in winter. In the tourist season, shuttle buses run between Urumqi's Nianzigou Passenger Bus Station and Burqin. From Burqin, you can hire a jeep, which costs around US \$190 for a round trip of three days. The jeep will park outside the scenic area, from where you change to special buses running in the scenic area.

For accommodation, you can choose a ger, a hotel or a cottage in the scenic area, which costs from US \$3/person.





# The Totem Dance “Yu Tu”

Photos & Article Li Yang

Human's ongoing search for meaning leads us to various different forms of traditional spiritual paths. In a remote corner of Qinghai Province<sup>1</sup>, the totem dance of “Yu Tu” (tiger) is the religious ritual that becomes the centre of the villagers' life. This dance ceremony has been retained for several thousands year, and the villagers believe that the worship can shun evil and receive blessings<sup>2</sup>.


Seven young men are carefully drawn out from the village, and they are given the pious task of mimicking these deity animals, bringing the Yu Tu alive on the “Yu Tu Preferment Day”<sup>3</sup> every year. Tied with bundles of straight hair, the men are first plunged their naked bodies into grey ashes collected from the brick beds, and then they will be painted with animal pattern of tiger or leopard.

Once the makeup is done, the seven men, who are divided into two “tigers” and five “leopards”, begin dancing and waving the

streamers of Buddhist scriptures at the village temple.

The sorcerer of the village would then lead them into worship, and each Yu Tu is to kneel orderly in prayer and chant Buddhist scripture. Finally, the sorcerer would bestow wine that is offered by villagers to the Yu Tu. It is believed that the partaking of wine allows the deities to enter the bodies of Yu Tu, and this act is to invite the spirits to join the totem dance.

In the wake of the outburst of firecrackers, all the Yu Tu are to rush down the hill for the village. They climb onto the roof of every house they come across. They would jump into the courtyard of the villagers' homes, and grab the food (usually steamed bread and meat) offered by the households and stick them on their twigs. Since people believe that the more food Yu Tu take from the household, the more blessed the family would be, the villagers would be furious if Yu Tu were to walk out empty-handedly. Some villagers even keep the Yu Tu in their houses with food and entertainment in order to express their reverence for the deities.

If there is a patient in the household, the Yu Tu would stride over the sick person several times. This is supposed to get rid of the monster of illness and heal the patient. 

Translated by Anju K.



<sup>1</sup> Nianduhu Village, Tongren County, Huangnan Tibet Autonomous Prefecture

<sup>2</sup> “Yu Tu” originated from the ancient Qiang people, and Yi is the other nationality who still keeps the same custom.

<sup>3</sup> 20th day of the 12th Lunar month





# Strange Ways in Shaanxi

Photos & Article by Zhu Jian

The world may be changing, but the Shaanxi natives seem to have locked in a time warp when it comes to their unique customs, partly helped by the province's remoteness and isolation. These quirky habits offer interesting sights, fascinating even the most jaded urbanite. After two decades of traipsing the hilly paths between the province's villages, our photographer has captured on film many of these charming glimpses of folk life.







### **The Money Child**

Fengzhou is a relatively impoverished town deep in the mountainous region, but the locals have acquired a tradition of showing off wealth. To celebrate the first birthday of a baby, relatives and neighbours give out "lucky money". The notes — large or small denomination — are tied in rolls by the grandparents with red ribbon and hung on the baby's front. Not exactly born with a silver spoon, but the infant has a nest egg for the future with such generous help from family and friends.



### **Ploughing Through**

Again as part of the first birthday celebrations, the grandmother makes a plough for the baby out of dough, which is tied with red ribbon and placed on the baby. The symbolism is obvious: when the child grows up, he will be as diligent and hard-working as the ox.

### **The Basket of Life**

After the obligatory banquet hosted by the parents on a child's first birthday, a bamboo basket filled with items such as abacus, book, pen, cards or food is then offered to the infant. Should the child grab a pen or an abacus, it indicates willingness to learn and be studious; while a preference for poker cards and food implies a gambler or layabout in the making.







### **Mosquito Nets are a Girl's Best Friend**

Surprisingly, the climate of the southern Shaanxi is similar to the south of Yangtze River. The soil is moist and fertile, just right for the rice paddies, but it is also a haven for large nasty mosquitoes. Hence, the custom here is to include a top-quality double bed mosquito net in a girl's dowry regardless of her family's wealth. The bride's relatives would hold up the mosquito net with poles and lead the wedding procession.



### **Potty Soup for the Bride**

On the wedding night, the sister-in-law makes a thick flour batter in a brightly coloured plastic or porcelain potty (new, of course). The batter is then stirred into a pot of boiling water to make a thick soup, while she chants: "One stir, two stirs, be there many sons and smart daughters". After the flour chunks are cooked, they are given to the bride to eat, hoping that the newly weds will bear lots of children.



### Long Noodles for Long Life

Shaanxi folk love to celebrate birthdays, especially for the elderly and the young. When an elder's birthday comes, his or her children are gathered at home. Family and friends join the party, which can last for days. After food and drinks are served and the birthday wishes are made, it's time to bring upon the "long life noodles". These delicately made noodles are about two millimetres wide and over a metre long. The texture is al dente and cannot be easily break with chopsticks, an auspicious sign. All members of the younger generations will then serve noodles from their own bowls to the elderly person, conveying wishes for happiness and longevity.



### Building for the Afterlife

Men in the countryside are considered old after they hit 50, and their key concerns become having their wives to make a set of funeral clothes for them, which are then sealed in the hole in the wall. Afterward, the family scrimps and saves to make two coffins in advance that are placed on the roof beam of the house. All of these preparations for one's death may seem morbid, but they are carried out matter-of-factly, just in case their children are too irresponsible to prepare a proper funeral.

### Dying to Play Mahjong

Villagers are crazy about the game of mahjong. Any excuse, be it rain or snow, when farm work is light or when there is a social event, mahjong is played. One local custom is that the first and third anniversaries of an elder's passing are celebrated. The second anniversary is the "vacant year", while anniversaries after the third are not celebrated. So the best party happens at the third anniversary, when family members not only deck the doors and altar with red paper, they also put out the Mahjong tables to entertain the guests — right in front of the altar.







### How Big is a Loaf of Bread

The guokui, also called "mo", is a type of dry bread. They are as large as pot and as thick as brick, weighing up to 10 kg. Flour is left to rise with yeast, then kneaded and rolled into the shape of a pot lid, before being baked slowly in a huge wok. The chewy bagel-like "mo" is a delicious provision for long trips, and they are considered as one of the "Shaanxi Top Ten Eccentricities".



### **Dumplings Make the Best Earmuffs**

Days get colder after the winter solstice by the lunar calendar, which is why on the day of Dongzhi ("coming of winter"), you'll find dumplings are the order of the day in Shaanxi households. It is widely believed that eating dumplings on this day protects one's ears from the ravages of the northerly wind. Why? Because as dumplings resemble the shape of ears, eating them can shield ears from the cold.



### **Belts or Noodles?**

Real deal Shaanxi noodles are up to 10 cm wide and over one metre long, more than two millimetres thick and each strand weighs more than two grams. They are not difficult to make; the dough is the key. Men can usually eat up to 500 g of such noodles.

### **Pancakes on the Roof**

Legend has it that Nu Wa (a goddess in Chinese mythology) made people from clay and water: clay to mould men and water to make women. She used five-coloured stones to mend the holes in heaven and earth, controlled floods and killed beasts to protect the people. She is the ultimate nature-conquering goddess icon in Chinese mythology. On the sixth day of the sixth month of each lunar year, a temple fair is held in her honour, when people of Lintong and Lantian toss their home-made pancakes onto the roofs of buildings or into wells. The act symbolically commemorates her heroic mending of the sky and earth.

*Translated by Cheng Lei*





**on the way**



# Right on Track: Chasing the Forestry Trains

*Photos & Article by Sun Zhihong*

In the woodlands of Heilongjiang, the forestry trains formed the backdrop to my childhood. When I was little, a narrow railway ran in front of my home. Every night when the stunted train passed our door, the whole house and kang (a built-in earthen bed) would shake as if there was an earthquake, as if the train was travelling right past my head. For many years, I have visited all the Forestry Bureaus in Heilongjiang that operate the little forestry trains, shooting tens of thousands of pictures, and all the sweet and bitter experiences of the lives of railway workers.





**A**s a boy, with my homework finished after school, I would sit on the track waiting for the train to come. In order to jump on the train for a glimpse into the locomotive, I would try my best to please the drivers, bringing them water and fruit. As time went by, I got to know them, and they let me climb up and down the trains as much as I liked, and even take the train to town: a privilege indeed. It was only when I graduated from high school that I bade farewell to my childhood friends, the forestry trains.

### Train Stations without Platforms

In 1995, I went to Weihe Forestry Bureau on assignment with a reporter of the Provincial Forestry Bulletin. Every now and then, as I caught a glimpse of a dashing forestry train, my heart would flutter with childhood nostalgia and affection. I felt an urge to pick up my camera — to record some final scenes of the forestry trains.

The first shooting was in Weihe. At early dawn, I carried my camera and could not help popping over to the train station. In the chill wind, I waited for more than three hours so that I could catch the train running from Weihe to Liushan, a train composed of a 28-ton steam engine and five carriages. The carriages were half the size of a standard size train. They offered no comfortable soft seats or beds. All the seats were made of wood. With no light bulbs, the train was lit by candles at night.

### The Little Train That Could

The forestry train is the little brother of the train family. With speed, carrying capacity and flexibility suitable for the woodland, forestry trains were the perfect vehicle for transporting lumber and goods. In 1825, the first railway was born in England; the first railway for transporting lumber dated back to 1851 when a wooden railway was built. In 1876, a steel railway was built. Trains have become the oldest mechanical land transport for forestry, and the most widely used in woodlands around the world. China's earliest woodland railway was built by Russia in 1912, in the woodlands of Heilongjiang Weishahe (today's Weihe Forestry Bureau). The railway is 20 km long and its tracks are 1,524 mm in width. The longest woodland railway in the world was built in 1953 by the Chinese National Forestry Engineering Corps. This railway is situated in the counties of Bayan, Mulan, Tonghe in the province of Heilongjiang, with a total length of 188.14 km. Together with tributary lines, branch lines and special zone lines, the entire line is 541.17 km long. With the railways being slowly replaced by other forms of transport, the once famous forestry trains will move aside, or in near future, disappear altogether.



1. At two o'clock in the early morning, the train stops at a station to add water and coal.
2. The train drivers who have spent 24 hours in charge.
3. Every year, after the winter train has been lit, a little red flower will be put on the train to bring good will and luck.
4. Engine stokers need to add coal every five minutes.
5. Driving a forestry train is a tough job.
6. Even until today, flags are used to signal the trains.

Accompanied by the whistle and rumblings of the wheels, the compartment bounced around greatly. Riding this kind of train for the first time could be nerve-racking.

The train ran at 20 to 30 km/hr. However large or small the stations were, the train had to stop. And there was neither platform nor waiting room at any of the stations, let alone any construction that symbolized a train station. A few meters from both sides of the train station stood a series of houses in which the forestry workers resided. The houses had picket fences, and firewood was piled up in front of the doors. Hearing the whistle, one could run out and jump onto the train; when the train reached the destination, one could just get off. After a long day's toil, the train finally reached the station in Liushan. I looked up and found the sun about to







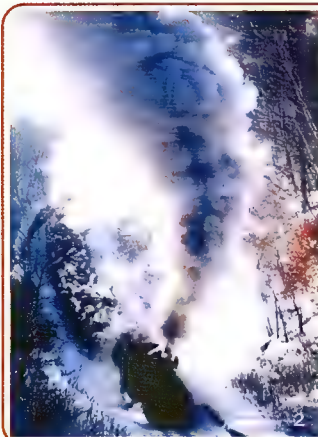
set. The setting sun glowed red on the train. I shot the whole roll of film in one go, while my heart stirred.

### Freeze Frame

Once, a photographer friend and I went to Wuchang Sanhetun Forestry Bureau in Heilongjiang to take photos. Those days were unusually cold: snow falling and the temperature below  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$ . A freezing wind pierced our cotton-padded overcoats and shoes and leather gloves. Even my extremely cold-resistant Hasselblad 503 CW camera was so frozen that it was "stuck". In order to take pictures of the whole process of the forestry trains transporting lumber, we attempted to win the trust of the driver. We finally got his permission

to board and photograph round the clock for the whole process.

Since the locomotive was far from roomy, it could only take one extra person, besides the chief and auxiliary drivers and a worker in charge of the furnace. One of us, therefore, had to stay in the locomotive to take photos and get warm, while the other sat in a lumber wagon at the back. We swapped places every hour, munched on frozen bread when hungry and grabbed some snow when thirsty. We spent 24 long hours on the train! Freezing cold and numb as our hands and feet were, and trembling as our lips were, we insisted on photographing the whole process: the forestry workers and drivers chopping loading and transporting the lumber, together with daily life in an extremely cold winter.



### Running the Trains

A 28-ton steam train, in normal operation, requires one chief driver, an auxiliary driver, and three workers on the furnace. The chief driver is responsible for driving the train, while the auxiliary driver overseeing the operation and sharing some of the driving. The steam engine, in general, once lit in winter and without problems, will run until after early spring, the time when the train takes a break and the furnace is extinguished. There are two shifts for drivers, but the trains don't stop. When a train is moving, there will be an extra front compartment added to the back of train. The conductor from that compartment needs to take notice of any lumber dropped along the way. When the train is running at night, the conductor needs to hang a signal light out of the compartment. If the train driver finds that he cannot see the signal light, he has to stop the train.

### Off the Rails

In the winter of 1999, I went to Zhanhe Forestry Bureau to take pictures of the forestry trains. To get a shot of the train dashing through the woods, I ran to the dispatch room of the station right after waking up. The staff said that at nine in the morning, a train carrying lumber would pass over Number Two Bridge. I packed my gear, walking more than an hour to get to the area, and then climbed another two hours to reach the hilltop. With the tripod and camera properly set, I scanned the woods, waiting for the train to come.



But by sunset, I had failed to see the train. Disgruntled, I plodded down the hill in the dark. I asked about it in the dispatch room and learnt that the train had gone off the tracks. It was still being repaired, and the train would not arrive till midnight the day after.

## A Brush with Death

In January 2001, a few photographer friends and I went to Weihe Forestry Bureau, to a place called "Five-mile land" (Wulidi) to take some photos of steam trains passing through the villages. We climbed the hill and waited patiently. As the train approached, we hurriedly picked up our cameras and got the best spots. At the time, I was carrying a "head-shaking camera". With the camera set, I took a look from the viewfinder, only to see two trees blocking the view. I took the camera and ran uphill. As I reached the peak, I was running too fast, I could not stop in time and plunged over a 10-m-high cliff. I lost consciousness. Fortunately, tree boughs had broken my fall so my friends saved me and took me to the hospital. Otherwise, I might have died.



*Translated by Dora Tsang*

1. Forestry trains were the perfect vehicle to transport lumber in the past.
2. A train struggles through the woods.
3. Trains for passengers and tourists.
4. The trains for tourists have much more comfortable interiors than the forestry trains.
5. Shooting in full winter gear.



## Friendly Notes

### ○ Current state of forestry trains:

Nowadays, the 28-ton steam forestry trains can only be found in Heilongjiang, China, where there are still two lines:



- 1) The steam train used for transporting lumbers is situated in Weihe Forestry Bureau in Heilongjiang, with a line length of 193 km (in which the main line is 72 km). It runs at 20 to 30 km/h.
- 2) The steam train for tourists is situated in the counties of Bayan, Mulan, Tonghe in the province of Heilongjiang, with a total length of 188 km. The train begins in township of Xinglong in Bayan and ends in Qingfeng post house station, a 98-km route.

### ○ Transport and Accommodation:

- 1) Taking photos of the train on the Weihe route: Take the train from Harbin, and get off at Weihe station (and then take a bus or cab to get to Weihe Forestry Bureau). The trip is about three to four hours and costs ¥20 to 30\*. There are a lot of guesthouses in Weihe. Weihe Guesthouse costs ¥15 to 150 a night and other small hostels cost about ¥10. You could always drive from Harbin along the Haegao Highway. The whole trip is about 170 km and takes about two hours. Once in Weihe, you can ride the steam trains through the ocean of wood and snow, enjoying the scenery of dense forest, cliffs, and beautiful snow. You can also try living in the cottages in the woods, and eating wild game.
- 2) Photographing the train of Xinglong township route: take a public bus from Harbin and get off at the township of Xinglong. It runs along the Hasui Highway,

covering 120 km and taking half an hour. If you want to take pictures of the train in Xinglong, the most convenient and inexpensive way is to find a travel agent in Harbin, and join a three-day train tour, which costs about ¥600 per head.

### ○ Tips for Photography:

- 1) Photographing forestry trains: In general, forestry trains begin operations in early winter and run till early spring. The best time for taking photos is right before and after Chinese New Year, because the cold weather makes the smoke from the train very clear. The best places to take photos: the hill at "Five-Mile Land" (Wulidi) as you can take pictures of the steam trains dashing through villages; the other is "Double Harvest Range" (Shuangfeng Daling) to take pictures of steam trains transporting lumber in the woods; the third is "Willow Hill" (Liushan) to take a special shot of



5

the trains changing routes and turning back.

- 2) Photographing tourist trains: the best season to take pictures is between July and September. The best places to take pictures are: a) Waxing Korean ethnic village; b) Qingfeng post house station; c) indigenous forests; d) lumber sites; e) indigenous woodlands and wildlife areas.
- 3) Equipment: Since photos of forestry trains are usually taken in the hills, where you can hardly find a flat area for your tripod, the most practical equipment is a 135 mm single-lens reflex camera, manual or automatic. Bring along a 17-35mm and a 70-200 mm lens. Don't forget your flashlight. When photographing at night, it is advisable to use a light, covered with coloured shades, to add extra light for a better effect.

\* US \$1 ~ ¥8



photo  
album

# Dressing for Royalty

Photos & Article by Lin Jinghua





**M**ost people do away with old clothes, but deep in Tibet, near the border with Nepal, is a small village (Kejia) where seven ancient robes have been handed down from generation to generation. The fabrics are adorned with gems and woven with legends of royalty.

Driving south from Burang County, we bumped for about 18 km along the twisted and rugged bank of the Kongque (Peacock) River. When we climbed a slope we saw Kejia Village surrounded by mountains. Plots of land around the village looked like a golden carpet with their ripening barley. Outside the village was a frontier checkpoint just a half-day walk along a narrow mountain path to Nepal, on the other side of the mountain.

Karma, the head of Criminal Investigation Brigade of Ngari Public Security Department, also came along with us. Karma was very popular in this area because of his bravery in protecting the cultural relics of Kejia Temple. In 1992, a foreigner paid US \$1.7 million to bribe a Nepalese and an Indian into smuggling the over-35-kg bronze Buddha statue out of the Kejia Village. Karma

disguised himself as a monk and pursued the thieves for three days before seizing the treasure back on a mountain path in Nepal. The villagers of Kejia lauded Karma as a hero from then on.

Accompanied by Karma, we might be lucky enough to see the precious attires. Many people were denied such request because the villagers were reluctant to show them to outsiders.

Fortunately, the village head granted our request and agreed to let the women of the seven families who kept the robes to model them for photographs in front of the Kejia Temple.

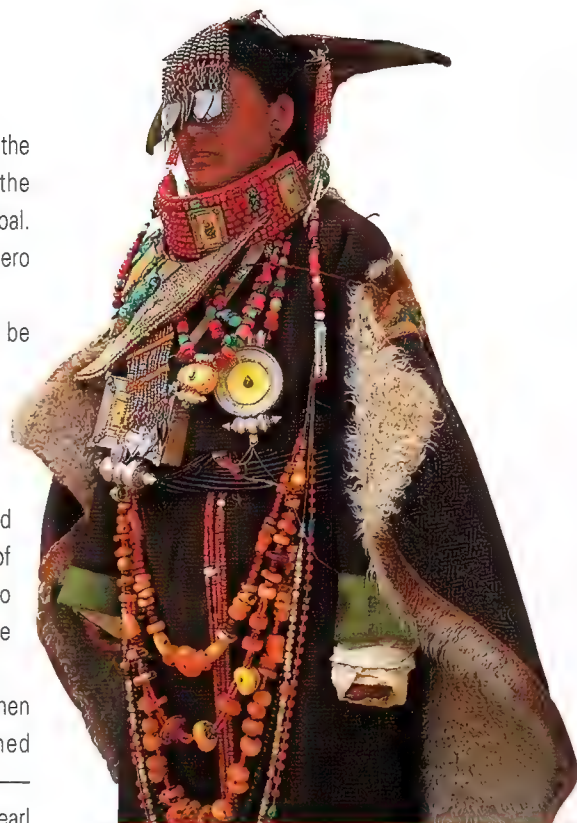
It was about four in the afternoon when the women came to the cobblestoned square. I was astounded by the gems — golden amber, purplish red coral, silver pearl and jade green stone. Some were as big as eggs and others the size of grains of corn.

The workmanship was extraordinary! The arrangement of the gems and the embroidery was truly one of a kind. Not only such long-lost artwork was invaluable, but the price for the gems was also splendid.

Since these mysterious treasures were handed down from ancient times, the official relics department had offered huge sums of money to buy them, only to be turned down by the villagers.

As we were driving away from Kejia Village after the photo shootings, I suddenly realized that we forgot to find out the origin of the dresses. However, Karma told us that he had asked the village head several times, but he never got a definite answer.

There is a saying



that the robes were the dancing attires of the ancient Guge Kingdom. There were originally a set of twelve robes, but only seven remained in Tibet, the others were lost a long time ago.

One time I saw a woman in a town in Nepal wearing the same kind of garments. The only difference was that her dress was only embroidered and had no gems. I thought that either the style might have been imitated from the robes in Kejia Village or that the robes themselves might have originated in Nepal. The truth remained unknown.

Nonetheless, we were sceptical about the robes being dance clothes. First of all, each robe weighed about 20 to 30 kg. Secondly, the headpiece restricted head movement. They would have been like shackles to the dancers!

*Translated by Wang Zengfen*

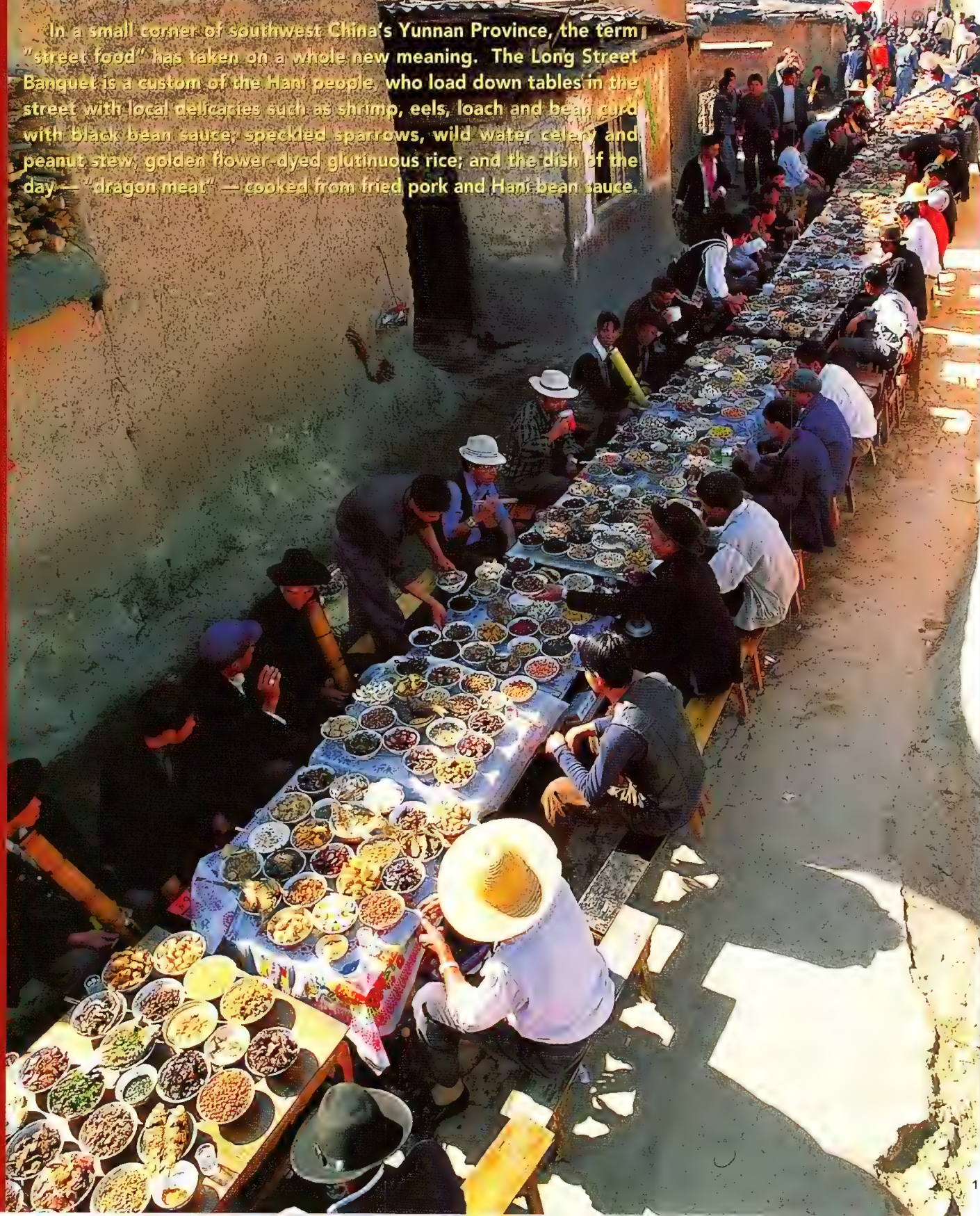




# A NICE LONG LUNCH

Photos by Xing Li Art by Wu Qionghua

In a small corner of southwest China's Yunnan Province, the term "street food" has taken on a whole new meaning. The Long Street Banquet is a custom of the Hani people, who load down tables in the street with local delicacies such as shrimp, eels, loach and bean curd with black bean sauce, speckled sparrows, wild water celery and peanut stew, golden flower-dyed glutinous rice, and the dish of the day — "dragon meat" — cooked from fried pork and Hani bean sauce.





**L**ong Street Banquet in the Hani<sup>1</sup> language is “ziwudu”, which means endless rounds of drinking. It is part of the hospitable and friendly nature of the Hani. All major festivals would involve the fun-seeking “ziwudu”, but the best is the Long Street Banquet at the “Angmatu” festival.

### Each to Their Own Gods

Hani customs are deeply rooted in their worship of gods and ancestors. Since the community relies on agriculture, naturally all festive sacrificial activities are related to praying for a bountiful harvest in one way or another. The ceremony is based on rules of the land — first the land god is worshipped, followed by the gods of the ponds, wells and waterways respectively.

The land gods are usually symbolized by sacred trees. The Hani see trees as the ultimate reflection of the magical powers of the land because they are deeply rooted in the earth. They believe that very tall trees are connected to the sky and represent a bridge between heaven and earth. This is why every Hani village and each Hani family has their own sacred tree which houses the protector gods for mankind.

The annual “Angmatu” festival of Yuanyang County, the grandest local religious festival, is held to honor the village god, Qianshan, who killed a monster to protect the village.

### Electing the Priests

The three-day “Angmatu” festival starts from the first day of the ox in the first month of in the lunar calendar. We came to Ezha region's Habo Village of Yuanyang County, with the hope of sharing the Long Street Banquet festivities with 297 families. Before the festival, the villagers handpicked this year's priests. The five to seven priests picked must be virtuous and articulate, middle-aged or older, and married with a family. From the priests, a senior Migu and junior Migu are chosen. “Gu” is what the Hani call the clan or tribe, while “Migu” is the elder or

chief of the tribe or selected by a democratic voting process. They are the ultimate authority throughout the entire sacrificial rite. Becoming a Migu is a lifelong honour for a Hani man. Before the ritual, they must bathe and change, eat only wholesome foods, practice abstinence, and even refrain from turning in their sleep in

order to show the utmost respect and devotion to the gods. They will conduct all the activities of the ritual with the village necromancer called the Beima. Hani villages usually have a few Beimas, and they are especially trained. In the past, the Beimas were the political and religious leaders of the Hani people. They are well-versed in astronomy, geography, clairvoyance and pharmacy — a kind of tribal intellectual. These days, the Beima is only responsible for religious activities.

The first parts of the ritual are “route-stopping” and “water well cleaning”. The Migu and the Beima lead the other hosts in sending off the gods of fire and plague from the back entrance of the village. This comes after they have cleaned the village on the morning of the “Bull Day”. They hang wooden knives and spears dipped in chicken blood to scare away evil spirits, then they make their way to the village entrance and prepare to welcome the village gods home. From then on, nobody is allowed to enter the village, should they enter by chance, they must wait until the end of the ritual before being allowed

to leave. This is followed by the “well-cleaning” activity. To the Hani, the cleaning of the water-well is the most sacred event because it is the home of the Water Goddess, and the forests are intimately linked to water, so only the purest and cleanest water should be offered to the gods.

<sup>1</sup> The Hani ethnic group live in Yunnan Province, with a population of 1.25 million. They mainly reside in the vast area between Yunnan's southern Yuan River and the Lancang River, between Mt. Ailao and Mt. Mengle. The Honghe Hani & Yi Nationalities Autonomous Prefecture's four counties of Honghe, Yuanyang, Luchun and Jinping have the highest Hani population.

1. The Long Street Banquet of Habo village features an entire street of tables full of food
2. The Town God Worship Ritual begins at first light
3. Visitors are welcomed at the Long Street Banquet





Chicken to be offered for the gods has been cooked, the sweet rice wine is prepared, bamboo baskets are filled with yellow glutinous rice, the head, liver and trotters of a large black pig are placed in front of the village god and the worshipping begins.

### Enter the Dragon Meat

Villagers choose two young, happily married men with no previous divorces or marriages to dress up as the female and male tribe gods, just like Qianshan and his female companion in the legend. Wearing a black headscarf and blue silk robe, the Migu leads other hosts to welcome the two "gods" to the sacred tree. Then the Beima begins a loud prayer. Afterwards the Migu gets a bucket of clean water from the well and begins to chant.

To the Hani, the sacrificial rite is strictly men's business and women cannot participate, but an exception is made for infertile women, who are allowed to pray for a child. After the prayers, the infertile woman presents a pork leg to the offering table. After the Migu has prayed for her and the leg of pork is given to her to hold, he imitates the cries of a baby, while the women pats the leg of pork symbolically, as if holding a baby.

Cutting the "Dragon Meat" signifies the end of the ritual. Beneath the village sacred tree, the hosts divide up the sacrificed pig and put the pieces on banana leaves. The Village Chief calls villagers one by one, while the men come to pick up their family share of "Dragon Meat". Some of the "Dragon Meat" is eaten after being sacrificed to the ancestors, the rest is buried with rice seedlings until the next spring, in the hope that they will be blessed by the gods.

After the ceremony, the Migu welcomes the village gods to dine with everyone in the Sacred Tree forests. The food is divided equally to

all the tables. As the feast begins, the quiet forests become as rowdy as a bar or pub. After a few rounds of drinking, the men start singing the "Haba", a Hani drinking song. The "Haba" can be about anything from the world's origins, the first people, history and legends, to every part of daily life. It is not all fun and games however. After the carousing, the elders begin a discussion about the village rules for next year. With everyone's agreement, these rules become a Village Charter by which residents must abide.



### After Wine, Come the Women and Songs

When dinner time comes, the Long Street Banquet begins.

As the Migu's bamboo table is laid at the start of the village, wives rush out from their homes with cooked dishes, jostling for the area near the Migu's table. The people believe luck rubs off from the Migu. The entire village comes alive with colour, noise and delicious food.

The Long Street Banquet is precisely that, an authentic smorgasbord of the best food nature has to offer, especially from the terrace fields. There are fish, prawns, eels, loach, freshly made beancurd with fermented black bean sauce, crisp celery, deep-fried glutinous rice cake, pointy beaked sparrows, peanuts, glutinous rice dyed a golden yellow to symbolize fortune, and of course, the banquet isn't complete without the "Dragon Meat".

The spread is laid out by each family and tasted by the Migu before being





placed on the table. The Migu selects some food to put on his own bamboo table in a symbolic dedication of food to the village gods.

When the tables are laid, the hosts start the music — drums, gongs and the suona (a Chinese wind instrument), and do the rounds of the tables. When everyone is seated, it's munching time!

The Banquet is split into men's and women's sections. On the side of the female tables, young girls stand next to their families' tables and wait on the guests. Only the housewives and elderly women are seated. In Hani families, women are usually prohibited from eating with everyone at the dinner table, but celebration is an exception.

After a few rounds of drinks, old women elegantly dressed in silk would start dancing the ancient dance of the Hani minority. When they take a break, the youngsters start the "lezuowu" dance (meaning "everyone dance"). People feast on snacks of deep fried fish, drink liquor made from fermented corn and listen to a never-ending collection of Hani songs that have been passed on for generations. This is not a time to be shy as everyone sings their hearts out.



Translated by Cheng Lei

1. A dazzling array of local delicacies and fresh produce from the mountains and the fields jostle for space at the Long Street Banquet.
2. Young people start dancing on the streets.
3. Women can also eat at the table at the Long Street Banquet.
4. The terrace fields of Yuanyang are fringed with mist.

## Travel Tips

▼ **Transport** : Yuanyang County is 346 km from Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province. Three coaches depart from Kunming South Bus Terminal daily, taking about 10 hours. Air-conditioned coaches depart at 10:40 am. Tickets are about US \$10 per person. Normal buses depart at 18:30 and 20:30. Tickets are US \$8 per person. (Enquiries: (0871) 354 4574).

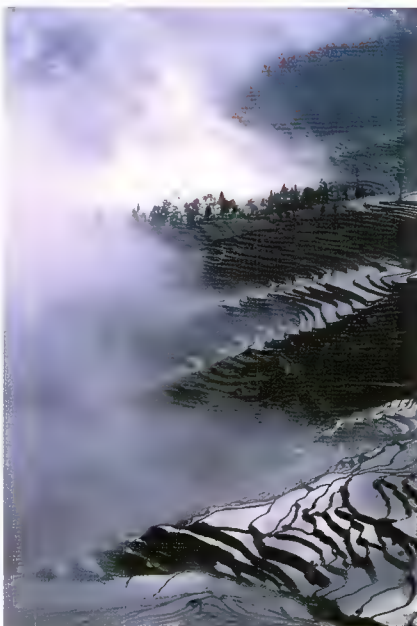
Habo Village is 74 km from Yuanyang County. Take the Luchun-bound bus from Yuanyang County. Alight near the road and walk into the village.

▼ **Accommodation** : It is available at either Yuanyang County or the Luchun County government hostel around 30 km from Habo village. If you're going to Yuanyang County during the "Angmatu" off-peak season, stay at

Nansha Hotel in the township of Nansha, where standard rooms will set you back US \$15 per room. In other seasons, the government hostel in Xinjiezhèn, in the old county town, is a good bet, tariffs start at US \$6 for rooms with bathrooms.

▼ **Food** : The predominant flavour of Yuanyang County cuisine is "sour". Also worth a try is the "Photographers' Home" in the Xinjie Town, in the old county. Good food at bargain prices, the restaurant is decorated with photographs of Yuanyang scenery and folk customs.

▼ **Notes** : The terrace fields of Yuanyang are found on both sides of the road from Yuanyang to Luchun. The best sightsee period is from November to April, just in time for the Long Street Banquet at Habo village. Travel about 5 km on the road from Yuanyang County to Luchun in the morning to the best spot for viewing and photographing the Tuguozhai Village, Yi minority village, and the terrace fields on the left side of the road. Continue on to the 11-km mark to see the Mengpin terrace fields on the right side of the road. Here you'll find the most spectacular and awe-inspiring terrace fields. They are built on the mountainside, consisting of three main parts — Mengpin, Mengkong, Baoshanzhai. For as far as the eye can see, terrace fields line the mountains in sweeping harmony.







# Pictures in *White*

*Photos & Article by Li Zhicheng*

Every winter, Jilin City holds a festival of frost, ice and snow. In addition to various ice and snow activities, northern China has no greater spectacle than the Jilin frost, which attracts huge numbers of photographers.



Jilin City is 80 km east of Changchun City, capital of Jilin Province. The Songhua River, with the famous Fengman Power Station, flows past the city in an endless stream. The river never freezes over even in the frigid winter.

### The Discovery of Rime Island

A vast ribbon of steam is created by the temperature difference between the air and the warm river water. The rising vapor, on meeting the cold air, condenses into frost on tree branches and thick tufts of grass near the riverbank. However, it is becoming more difficult to take good frost scene photos in urban Jilin because of the warm climate in recent years. Fortunately, some photographers and I found the perfect place with wonderful frost that we named Rime Island.

The island lies in Hantun Village, of Wulajie Manchu Autonomous Town, 30 km north of Jilin City. It is a natural mid-river island of just 50 ha, located in the lower reaches of the Songhua River. From here, vapor forms easily into dense and enduring frost on trees.



— Frost is especially thick on the trees near the riverbank.

Type of Camera: Pentax 645N  
Lens: 45mm-85mm f4.5  
Aperture: f8 Shutter: 1/60 sec.  
Exposure Mode: Average +1 EC  
Film: Fuji RVP ISO 50 slide

— The frost coats trees and grass alike.

Type of Camera: Pentax 645N  
Lens: 45mm-85mm f4.5  
Aperture: f16 Shutter: 1/45 sec.  
Exposure Mode: Average +0.7 EC  
Film: Fuji RVP ISO 50 slide



## Manchu Exhibition Hall

We arrived at Rime Island in the afternoon. Since frost did not appear at this time of the day, we went sightseeing. The Songhua River valley is the birthplace of the Manchu nationality. There is an exhibition hall on the island. Household items collected from the local people introduce the customs of the Manchu nationality as well as those of the residents in northeast China. Also on display are local buildings modelled after the style of the Manchu and the farmhouses in northeast China. They include such structures as "Sanheyuan" (a compound with three houses around a courtyard), quadrangles, cellars and small shacks.

▶ At sunset, wisps of smoke rise from the entrance of the Songhua River.

Type of Camera: Pentax 645N Lens: 45mm-85mm F4.5 Aperture: F11  
Shutter: 1/20 sec. Exposure Mode: Average Film: Fuji RVP ISO 50 slide

▶ At dawn, the earth is lined with a pale blue.

Type of Camera: Pentax 645N Lens: 85mm-165mm F4.5 Aperture: F8  
Shutter: 1.5 sec. Exposure Mode: Average Film: Fuji RVP ISO 50 slide







## A Heaven-Sent Opportunity

In northern China, the nights are long and the days short in winter, and the sun sets before 4 p.m. A local worker said that if dense fog begins to form over the river surface at dusk, frost would certainly appear the following morning. We took photos of the beautiful sunset while keeping an eye on the river surface. When the sun gradually dipped below the horizon, the temperature dropped noticeably. Sure enough, wisps of mist began to rise from the surface of the river. The fog became denser as it got dark. We waited with anticipation for the dawn.

At 6 a.m., I rushed out to check the light, but only found a large veil of white mantling everything. Through the twilight, I spotted dense frost on the trees outside the door.

We hurried out with our cameras in great delight. Walking in the dense morning mist, we felt as if we were in a fairyland. The village on the opposite shore looked hazy against the light bluish background of dawn, like a live Chinese ink-and-wash landscape. When the sun slowly emerged from behind the veil of fog, the vapor began to disperse. Tinted with the golden rays of the morning sun, the frost-laden trees were a magnificent sight. When the sun was rising, the silvery world bathed in pure air became even more crystal-clear against the azure sky. We kept clicking our cameras; for fear that the flawless fairyland would disappear in a twinkling. With the temperature rising, the rime on tree twigs began to melt, floating down like snowflakes.

### Tips for Ice and Snow Photography :

- ◆ **Preparations:** Winter temperatures in northeastern China are usually below  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . It is essential to keep warm at all times. A quality down coat is very useful. For photographers, it is essential to keep the hands warm. My experience is to wear a pair of wind-proof, waterproof and breathable mountaineering gloves over a pair of thin woolen ones. This way you can keep your hands warm and nimble to operate the camera.
- ◆ **Camera Maintenance:** Batteries are apt to cause trouble below freezing point, especially the ordinary alkaline ones that drain quickly. It is better to use the lithium type and have spares ready. Keep them in the warm places on your body. Remember to put the photographic equipment back to the bag after use before going indoors. Do not open the bag for several hours after going indoor, as the lens will have a film of frost after exposure to the cold all day, and rapid heating could damage it.
- ◆ **Photography Tips:** Exposure errors are easy to make when photographing vast fields of snow. To get a good picture of white snow, it is advisable to adjust the exposure according to the percentage of snow framed on the viewfinder. On the basic exposure value shown on the interior light meter or the reflecting light meter, you should increase exposure compensation by a half or one point. Bracketing is another way to solve the problem. For example, if you have decided to add one point, you should further increase a half point of bracketing. Thus, you will get three different exposures of +0.5, +1 and +1.5 respectively.



Translated by Anju K.

◆ The ferry to the island breaks through the morning mist

Type of Camera: Pentax 645N Lens: 80mm-160mm f4.5 Aperture: f16  
Shutter: 1/20 sec. Exposure Mode: Average +0.7 EC Film: Fuji RVP ISO 50 slide



### Transport:

One bus every 15 minutes from Changchun Bus Station to Jilin City, about 30 yuan\*.

One bus every 30 minutes from Jilin Bus Station to Wulajie Town, about 11 yuan. From Wulajie Town, change to taxi or pedicab to Rime Island, about 10 yuan a trip.

### Accommodation:

Travellers can choose to stay on the island or with local residents in Hantun Village. All are traditional farmhouses of northeast China. They are simple and unadorned, but you can experience the joy of sleeping on a heated brick bed. The full board is 30 yuan daily per person. Only public toilets are available.

**Admission to Rime Island:** 15 yuan, including the ferry fare.

**The Best Time to Visit:** From mid-December to mid-February is the best time for frost fog.

\* US \$1 ~ 8 yuan







# Living History in Xiamei Village

Photos & Article by Wang Min

**A man-made canal runs through**  
**2 Xiamei Village, reflecting the houses on the**  
**banks built in style of the Yangtze River Delta; villagers busy with**  
**harvesting hurry along with bamboo baskets on their backs, while**  
**children run gleefully across the tiny bridge; long and narrow rain**  
**shelters line the sides of the river, snaking their way towards the horizon....**  
**Xiamei Village, tucked away in the mountains, is a dreamy water town.**

**I** paid many visits to Mt. Wuyi before. The treacherous peak of Tianyou was conquered; the songs sung by Nine-Bend (Jiuqu) River's boatmen were heard; the must-see sights were travelled and the must-do water activities were all done. Aside from the spectacular sceneries, Mt. Wuyi still has

a lot more to offer. And that was why I returned to Mt. Wuyi again in the golden autumn. But this time, I stayed at Xiamei Village, a mere eight kilometres from Mt. Wuyi Tourism Centre, where warm breeze infused the place with sweet scent of evergreen shrubs.





## Stepping Back in Time

Xiamei Village dates back to the Sui Dynasty (581—618), and the passageways and streets there were built in the following seven hundred years. The township grew to be the most prosperous during the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911). Much credit goes to two tea merchants, the Zou brothers. Not only did they buy land and construct more than 70 buildings in the village, but they also funded the expansion of water canals, creating a reliable network for transport. Even now, Xiamei Village is lucky to have retained more than 20 ancient alleyways and historic wells of eight hundred years old.

The long narrow alley, which housed a row of rain shelters and a group of old houses with black-tiled roofs, led me to the Zou Family Ancestral Hall. Built in 1793, this hall is the most important building in the small village. Although it has only an interior space of 200 m<sup>2</sup>, every inch of the hall is meticulously decorated. For instance, the front door has a symmetrical pattern of over 40 brick carvings. The windowsills, door lintels, eaves and wall shelves are all adorned with carvings of animals and flowers. Brick carvings come in all sizes and shapes, and the many artworks hung on the walls leave visitors amazed and inspired.

The Zou residence nearby is an equally striking architecture. The courtyards, bedrooms, study rooms and rear garden are festooned with plenty of unique brick carvings. Meanwhile, wooden carvings are found on the windowsills and ceiling beams. One can tell that the owner paid exclusive attention to details, for the column base, stone fish bowls and stone plant holders are all inscribed with the elegant patterns of the bygone era. Unfortunately, much of the delicate artwork is in ruins.

## Carvings That Speak

Xiamei Village is well known for its over 500 decorative brick carvings on the gates, walls, courtyards and gardens of buildings. The subjects of these carvings include popular auspicious animals, scenes from

legends and eminent characters from operas. These carvings are richly symbolic and they express the owner's social status and interests. They can also stand for hopes, prayers, mottos and wishes. For example, the carving of a bottle, "Ping", is one of the eight auspicious items in folklore. It has the same pronunciation as the word "peace" and it also represents inner wisdom. Another interesting carving is the ancient weapon halberd, "ji". On one hand it signifies the honour of the warrior's spirit; on the other hand, its pronunciation is the same as "lucky", "achievement" and "prominence". Last but not least, the carving of ten spotted deer, "lu", also has a hidden message. Since "deer" pronounces as the word for "reward", "ten deer" suggests generous reward and endless riches.

*Translated by Cheng Lei*

1. The Zou family ancestral hall is rich with old-world charm and architectural appeal.
- 2, 4, 5. The subjects of these exquisite carvings are popular auspicious animals, scenes from legends and characters from operas.
3. Rain shelters add charm to the ancient water town.



## Travel Tips

Aside from the marvelous collections of carvings, colourful murals, banners and tombstones, you can also experience real rural life at Xiamei Village by living with the locals for a day, or watching a folk performance. For 60 yuan\*, you and your friends can even make your own rice cake.

**Transport:** Xiamei Village is about eight kilometres from Mt. Wuyi Tourism Centre, 12 km from Mt. Wuyi City, from where direct buses to Xiamei run each hour at three yuan/person. It's just as convenient to take a taxi from the city or the Tourism Centre.

**Xiamei Village Admission:** 20 yuan/person

**Food and Accommodation:** locals offer a country-style banquet for ten people for 180 yuan/table, but there are no hotels in Xiamei.

**Side Note:** Want to know more about the history and stories of Xiamei Village?  
Call Mr. Zou Quanrong at 0599-520 6138.

\* US \$1 = 8 yuan







# Wang Mingang

## The Road to Riches

*Photos & Article by Zeng Baoqi*

He's a Hong Kong businessman who has made the great leap westwards, opening three hotels situated on the ancient Silk Road (the Zongka Guesthouse in Qinghai Province, Dunhuang Villa in Gansu Province and Luzhou Guesthouse in Turpan, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region). Wang Mingang has been developing and promoting "cultural tourism" in the western regions of China since 1993.

Why did a Hong Kong merchant chose to invest in such a remote area? Why did he target the Silk Road? Is he making money out of his huge investment? How did he get such an idea? With all these questions, I knocked at the door of Wang's office.



## A New Merchant on an Old Road

Wang explained to me that since the Silk Road is already famous worldwide, the promotional cost was minimal and a constant volume of customers was guaranteed. He recalled that a survey conducted in Japan in the early 1990s showed that every year, up to 300,000 Japanese wanted to visit the Silk Road, but as the total hotel capacity on the route allowed only 50,000 people a year, Japanese travel agencies had to send the extra visitors to other destinations such as Beijing and Guilin.

In the early 1990s, Wang and Luo Kangrui started their businesses in the mainland almost simultaneously. Luo founded the mega shopping mall, Xintiandi, in Shanghai, where he renovated the old Shikumen houses, keeping their exterior architectural styles while converting the interiors into bars and restaurants. Xintiandi quickly became a popular high-end entertainment complex, where a bottle of Heineken can cost up to 40 yuan there.

In the far west, Wang built several cultural hotels, where the ancient Silk Road lifestyle is combined with modern comfort. The first, the Dunhuang Villa (near the Sand Humming Hill in Dunhuang, Gansu Province) is built with blue-brick floors and wooden-eaves, and it is heavily decorated with art. The hotel has two special function buildings — Scholars Building and Experts Building — prepared for those involved in long-term studies of the Silk Road and Dunhuang.

Wang's second hotel, Zongka Guesthouse, is situated opposite of the Tar Temple in Xining, Qinghai Province. Built in Tibetan architectural style, all the hotel's doors, windows and columns are colourfully painted. Guests can pray, meditate or read in its Buddha Hall, Sutra Tower and library.

The third hotel, Luzhou Guesthouse, is situated on the Youth Road (also called Grape Street) in Turpan, Xinjiang. Its interior is of Uyghur style, and it has a kang, or brick-bed, in each guestroom. Its restaurant provides Moslem food and traditional Xinjiang dishes. In short, each of the hotels is characterised by the local ethnic lifestyle. Such grand decoration comes with a steep price tag. In the Dunhuang Villa, for example, a fortress-style suite costs US \$300 a night, while a siheyuan villa costs US \$1,000 a night.

Wang has encountered many barriers and difficulties due to the slow development in the regions. This inevitably affects the return of his investment.



1. Wang Mingang looks more like a scholar than a businessman.
- 2.3. Inside a siheyuan (courtyard) house in the Dunhuang Villa.
4. The Zongka Guesthouse in Qinghai.



## Investing With Optimism

Over the past 10 years, Wang invested more than HK \$300 million (about US \$40 million). During the first six or seven years, not only did he fail to get a return, but he also had to refinance the hotels. The breakeven point was reached in 2000 and, two years ago, he began to profit slightly. After a

series of terrorist attacks

in other countries, more travellers chose

China as their destination, giving

Wang the hope that his business would flourish.

Unexpectedly, there was the SARS outbreak, causing mass tourist

cancellations. Wang remained sanguine when discussing this misfortune.

"It was not as I had planned and it imposed financial pressure on me. In general, a new business should reach breakeven within two or

three years and gain the capital back in five or seven years. Now it took me eight years to wait for the breakeven, longer than most cases. I know it was not my fault. Many circumstances, including inadequate transportation, hampered progress. The situation is much more difficult than I thought. But you cannot expect every journey to be smooth sailing. The key is to act to solve problems."

Wang admitted that he envied Luo Kangrui who has been very successful in Shanghai. But when he looked at his friends who have stayed in Hong Kong and suffered painful losses in the real estate business, he found the balance. "Cultural tourism is the trend and I'm currently going through the bottleneck. I'm sure it will be a bright day tomorrow." Wang never regretted his decision to invest in China's western region. Being confident in its future, Wang believed it would be wise to hold on.

## Balancing Conservation and Development

Wang, an experienced businessman, knew how to be patient and proceed carefully and steadily. But there are many barriers to the development of cultural tourism in the western region. "For example, although the government limited the number of hotels, some government departments have actually built their own training centres or dorms, which are in fact five-star hotels. While serving as internal guesthouses, these 'training centres' also draw our guests away and disturb the market order." He believed there was a lack of planning for tourism in the country's modernization drive. For instance, little attention has been paid to the protection of cultural relics and the





1. Experiencing the culture of the western region.  
2. Wang's office is decorated with oriental art print.

development and administration of scenic areas. The subject of sustainable development in scenic areas has been put on the schedule only in recent years.

Balancing the conservation of an historic area with its development is a delicate problem. Wang admitted that there was contradiction between development and protection. He believed China could learn from Europe, where many governments have preserved the entire old city areas while developing new urban areas separately. In this way, the old city can be preserved in its original look, without new buildings.

"In the surrounding areas of cultural protection zones, there should be tourist facilities suitable for the theme zone. It's alright to have karaoke and bars, but they should not become the main attraction," Wang said. "Some people say that tourists won't go to Iran because there is no wine, no night clubs. Iran's Minister of Culture makes it clear that his country is selling cultural tourism. Those who want nightlife may come to Iran after they have had their fill of entertainment elsewhere. China is still not clear about the key to cultural tourism." Wang sighed, showing his disappointment. Near his Luzhou Guesthouse in Turpan, the local government has spent tens of millions of yuan to build a very modern "Grape Corridor", which destroyed the area's original look.

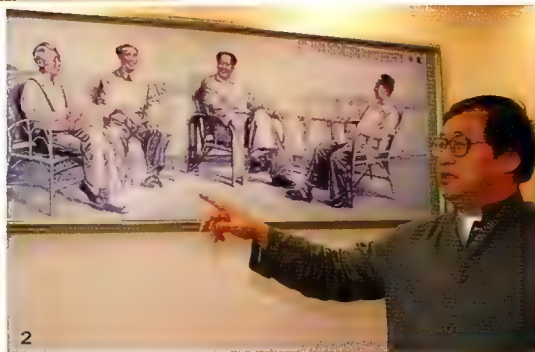
"It won't help whatever we say about it," Wang said. "We have no warning before the construction; all we can do is to complain afterwards, but the landscapes of the old city are gone forever." He stressed that he did not oppose progress and modernization. "Every

plan should be worked out carefully and before local officials make their decisions, they should solicit the expert opinions. Since the western region has plenty of land, it's possible to leave the old city alone and develop a new area at a different site."

## Opening to the World

Wang based his philosophy on his many travels and constant learning. He made investigative trips not only in China, but also in other countries in order to learn how his foreign counterparts do business.

One must know the demands of his customers as well as the strategies of his counterparts. As one of Xinjiang's major attractions is its Islamic culture, Wang visited Uzbekistan, Iran, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries that share the Moslem culture.



"To tell the truth," Wang said, "the Islamic architecture in Xinjiang is very unsophisticated, not as brilliant as that in Iran and Turkey. At present, because of safety concerns, tourists dare not go to Central Asia. But who knows what the situation will be in a few years? We'll be confronted with the question of how to attract visitors and how to compete. So I must study continuously and enhance my own knowledge." Wang preferred to have his travels in other countries arranged by their governments, as he is not only going to see things with his own eyes, but to study their histories and cultures. Ten years ago, when an international travel organization initiated a Silk Road project to unite all the countries on the road to promote the travel route, it invited Wang to take part, as they knew he was involved in the tourist trade.

Wang planned to extend his Silk Road program to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Though he has not yet recovered his investment, but Wang has gained much since he started his cultural tourism business 10 years ago. "While promoting cultural tourism, my cultural vision has widened and I can see the broad dimensions of history," he said. "It has influenced my personal cultivation and nourished my thinking."



## Postscript

Wang Mingang, wearing a traditional-style coat and a pair of large rimmed glasses, can pass as a scholar. But once he starts to talk about his cultural business, he is instantly transformed into a businessman who knows how to seize every opportunity for profit.



## FOCUS ON XINJIANG

On the vast land of Xinjiang in Northwest China, there are mountains, basins, deserts and lakes, all providing tourists with numerous attractions — ruins of ancient cities and tombs along the Silk Road; Turpan, an oasis in the desert; Kanas Lake, a gem embedded in the Altay Mountains; Bayanbulak, the Swan Lake; and the world's second largest desert, the Taklimakan. The minority ethnic groups living in Xinjiang, such as the Uyghur, Kazak, Mongolian, Uzbek, Tajik,

Xibe, Kirgiz and Tatar, all have their own unique and colourful culture.



## FOCUS ON SHAANXI

Shaanxi is the cradle of the Chinese civilisation and Xi'an was the capital of 13 dynasties. This has left Shaanxi a rich legacy of historical sites and cultural relics. In the provincial capital Xi'an, there is the fascinating terracotta army unearthed from the tomb of the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang; the tomb of Tang-dynasty Wu Zetian, China's first empress; and the stele forest. The province's beauty is capped with the sheer cliffs of Mount Huashan and the yellow earth of the Loess Plateau.



## FOCUS ON YUNNAN

The mountainous wonderland of Yunnan enjoys a favourable warm climate all year round. Its capital, Kunming, sitting alongside Yunnan's largest lake, Dianchi, has the honourable name of "Spring City". The province is full of natural wonders and cultural relics, such as the Stone Forests, the Shangri-la, and the ancient cities of Dali and Lijiang. With over 20 diverse ethnic groups making up about one-third of the population, opportunities abound for you to see their characteristic cultures and customs.



# The Call of China's West

**FOCUS ON TIBET** The Tibet Autonomous Region of China is a land of mystery for tourists, a land of wonders for explorers, a land of purity for Buddhists, and the ultimate challenge for mountaineers. Its beautiful landscapes, unique geographical features and rich cultural legacy continue to attract an increasing number of visitors.

The countless attractions of Tibet make it impossible to include them all in one book. This photographic publication offers an introduction to some of the Region's most celebrated features: the Potala Palace and its precious collection of cultural relics; the Jokhang Temple with strings of worshippers prostrating themselves before it; the Shoton Festival and the Sunning of Buddha ceremony; the ruins of the mystical Guge Kingdom; and the amazing Qiangtang Grassland....

At the same time, *Focus on Tibet* outlines the six major routes to Tibet and the many stunning landscapes found along the way.



Paperback Only

## FOCUS ON GUIZHOU

Guizhou is a land of splendid natural scenery. Its towering mountains and karst landforms team up with the gurgling rivers and magnificent waterfalls to form a wonderful work of Mother Nature. Huangguoshu Waterfalls and the limestone caves are the province's most frequented scenic spots. The 17 ethnic groups living in the picturesque province further colour the land with vivid customs and joyous festivals. It is its natural beauty and culture that make Guizhou a perfect travel destination.



## FOCUS ON GUANGXI

Unusual topography has endowed the province with numerous spectacular karst formations — limestone caves, pinnacles and rocks. The most famous and enchanting scenic spot is Guilin, and the most travelled route, on the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo. The coastal city of Beihai has the country's largest beach, the Silver Beach. Other attractions include the diverse traditional customs of ethnic minorities, the Sino-Vietnamese border area, and the mysterious Huashan cliff paintings.



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# Natural Born **Roamer**

Photos by Li Xueliang    Article by Huang Yanhong

**Li Xueliang is so addicted to photography that he would rather leave home 300 days a year and spend all his savings on equipments than to give up.**

**A native of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Li was once the trumpeter of a band. But after he became infatuated with photography, he gave up his comfortable life and steady income to pursue his new love. Years after years, he roamed across Xinjiang to take pictures, especially in the desert area.**



Since Li was on the road for so long, when he finally returned to the capital of Xinjiang, Urumqi, he felt out of place. Just as well, he now sees the big city as a courier station, a place where he develops negatives, buys new equipment, repairs car and runs errands. Once his business is finished, he is back to his old life — the life of a mad photographer.

I first learnt about Li two years ago from a photographer friend of mine, who said that Li was no ordinary chap. I became curious and wanted to invite Li to join my new photo project. When I phoned Li up, his deep and sonorous voice showed surprise. But he was very efficient and straightforward, and he sent a bundle of photographs to me a short time later. However, when I tried to contact him again, he was out of town.

Given his stay in Urumqi was short, and there was no other mean of getting to him, I had no clue when I would be able to see him for a second time.

Unexpectedly I bumped into him in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, to which he had come to publish a Xinjiang Picture Album. This was the first time I saw his series of pictures. Words alone could not describe how captivating those images were. The illustration was bold and unrestrained, revealing his ardent love of nature and unique perception. Li's years of hard work had crystallized into a magnificent album.

## Seeking the Dead

Li Xuiliang, towering with long hair, carries the air of a quiet artist. He is very down-to-earth for his renowned fame.

I asked Li why he only photographed Xinjiang and not other places. Li said, "Xinjiang is such a vast region with splendid scenes; there is a deep cultural heritage in the region. I can never exhaust my stock of Xinjiang pictures. I have no motivation to go elsewhere."

"Which is your favourite part of Xinjiang?"

"Xiaohe." Li replied in the blink of an eye.

Although he went to Xiaohe only once, he would remember that place for the rest of his life. The journey to Xiaohe to find the ancient tombs was the most meaningful for him, and he forever forged a deep link with the Silk Road civilization.

A Swedish archeologist, Folke Bergman, discovered the graveyard



1. Li Xuiliang and his most elementary camera gears.
2. He is head over heels in love with photography.
3. Li's adventure to the Xiaohe Graveyard was published in *China Tourism* before.
4. "Crossing over Xinjiang" is a product of Li's hard work.

of the ancient Loulan people by chance 66 years ago. It was a small hill containing a thousand coffins — a place haunted by spirits and ghosts.

Several decades on, Chinese archeologists tried to rediscover the mysterious place with no success. In December 2000, Li accompanied an archeological expedition to the Gobi Desert, hoping to find the Xiaohe graveyard. But a sudden sand storm dispersed the expedition and Li was left alone. The camels were nowhere to be seen; Li was extremely fortunate that he could still trace the footprints left on the sand to rejoin the party.

After this dangerous incident, the graveyard search seemed like a futile goal. As food and water became scarce, the head of the expedition decided to call off the mission. All the members of the team were depressed on their way of return. However, they failed to hit upon the target area after three hours of the journey, and the team became anxious.

In the midst of despair, a team member abruptly let out a cry of astonishment, "Look! Xiaohe Graveyard!" Li and all members of the expedition were thrilled; they danced and embraced each other.

As a photographer, Li had the privilege to enter the graveyard first. Li said, "As I walked in, my heart started to swell. I knew I was the first Chinese who entered the graveyard since Bergman's discovery. It is hard to reckon the inspiration and creativity that I gained from this event."

Li took shots that shocked the people: row after row of blocks of wood; pile after pile of skulls and bones — an impression left on the mind of what once was 3500 years ago in Xiaohe.

## Life in the Wild

After living in the wild for many years, Li knows how to cope with all kinds of outdoor conditions: cold, heat, sun, rain, showers, wind, snow, thunder and lightning. Wearing a mere wool pullover and a vest, he can live through winter.

A friend of mine told me that Li had accompanied him to the



Gongnaisi Grassland on New Year's Day this year. It was snowing heavily and the scenery was just dazzling. Every photographer there was standing in the knee-deep snow and taking pictures. Nonetheless, despite their sophisticated winter shoes, they all got frostbite and their toes were blackened. Li told everyone to rub their feet with snow, and rubbing was all they did for three days. People were astounded when they found that Li himself only wore a pair of plain rubber shoes, but his feet were perfectly fine.

My friend exclaimed, "Li is a yak! Only highland yak has such tenacity against the cold."

Though winter can be cruel, but Li is too infatuated with nature to take notice. It seemed that nothing could stop him from embracing the wild land. Known for his ability to survive the most hazardous environment,

Li won the trust of his associates. People feel that as long as they are sticking with Li, they have nothing to fear, because Li will prepare everything. He knows where to pitch a tent, where to find water, and what to leave on the field.

Once Li and his friends went on a mission to photograph diversiform-leaved poplars. As soon as they got off the bus, he led them to a secluded place where they began to dig. The soil was loose, and they uncovered a kettle, a boiler, a packet of salt and a bottle of vinegar — this was Li's private storage space. Li feels at ease in anywhere on earth, and his "home" is boundless.

Li is an introvert. Staying far from crowds and noise, he rarely makes friends. Because he is always on the move, nature becomes his only companion. This is not to say that he is impervious to loneliness, for he fears nightfall when he is alone in a tent. During those vulnerable moments, he is badly in need of someone to talk to.

Perhaps it is due to this loneliness that he finds an awakening to art following his infatuation with photography. In his notes he wrote, "There are all sorts of pain in life. My pain comes when I fail to capture the best pictures possible. Photography is like a girl I am madly in love with, and I cannot help but to give my heart and soul to her. I may go to one place many times and fail to take some decent pictures. At those times, I would return in sadness and grief. Yet in the most unexpected times I may come upon the most beautiful scene — things has a way to turn out wonderfully!"

Li said, "What I see in nature is wonder. She is solemn,

magnificent and elegant, and she has tremendous strength. For all she has to offer, it is worth my effort to overcome hardship, pain and solitude. I must strive to an awakening of its presence in me."

## Danger in the Desert

Li's own account of his legendary voyages is full of hardship, romance and danger. Once he drove in his car to Junggar Basin, northern Xinjiang, where he found the mysterious Yadan. Erosion by wind and rain for thousands of years has enabled Yadan landform to produce brightly coloured, strange and odd shapes.

At night he was surrounded by absolute silence and darkness. He became frightened as nothing else lived in the region. To ease his restlessness, he gathered wood to make a bonfire, pitched his tent and began to cook. The smell of lamb comforted him somewhat. But just as he was beginning to eat, he saw something dark come towards him.

He reckoned it was a firefly.

Then he suddenly realized that no firefly would come at that season — it must be a pack of wolves!

He jumped to his feet and climbed back into his car in a snap. Although the headlights scared the wolves away,

Li was driving in horror for two hours before he finally reached the highway around midnight.

He again returned to the basin before daylight. His tent was still there, but the fire was long extinguished; only the smell of the lamb remained.

Li was glad that the wolves did not return. As the sun rose in the east, he began to take pictures of the basin town and forgot about his hunger.

Another time Li and a friend were in the desert in southern Xinjiang to take pictures with a local guide. Since the guide had some other business to attend to, he had his son to take over his place. Everything went fine until they were on their way back. Out of the blue, the young



1. The messy sitting room of Li's home.  
2. Li keeps more than 30,000 films here.





guide just went down on his knees and cried. It turned out that he had lost his way, and he was leading the group walking in circles.

Since their food and water could only last for a day, the situation became serious. They started walking more quickly, but they still could not find the way out. Li's friend asked Li to take care of his family if he died, as he could walk no more. Li asked the young guide to stay with his friend, while Li himself climbed on a sand ridge that was visible from afar. He crawled on all fours for three hours. He spotted a dark line. He judged that it must be a forest by the river — a gut feeling based on his previous experience in the desert. He went back to his friend and the guide in great excitement, and they walked safely out of the desert on the third day.

### Photography, the Home Wrecker

Li Xueliang is not rich, but he would rather spend all his life-long savings, US \$25,000, on camera gears. He even borrowed money to buy a cross-country vehicle. He has led a life of a roving photographer, and drove 540,000 km in six years.

His colleagues visited his home and were surprised to find that the place was void of furniture, not even a refrigerator. Li's reply was simple, "I have no money. Why should I get a refrigerator? I spend 300 days in the year in the field. I don't need a refrigerator anyway."

Li leads a simple life. In order to save time for work, he keeps his meal plain: lamb soup or congee, with mutton cubes roasted on a skewer.

Li's mother is more than 80 years old, and when he is in the field, he always thinks of her. He said that once he called his mother that he

would come back for dinner, but ended up distracted by work and forgot about the get-together. His mother, on the other hand, prepared dumplings and waited for him the whole night. She got so angry when she finally got to see Li, that she beat him with a broomstick.

Li had a normal marriage life before, but a new love took over

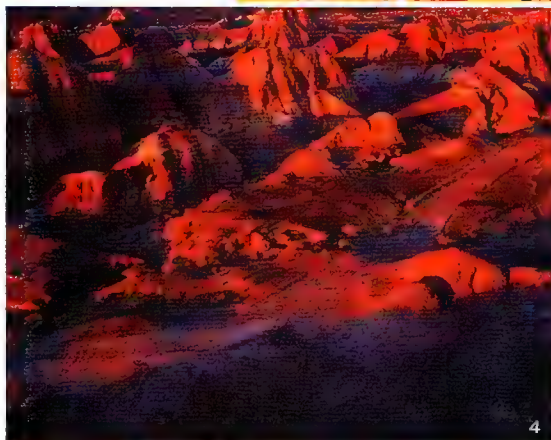
his mind and time — his passion for photography. Li eventually divorced but he remained a good friend to his former wife. Li said, "My state of affairs does not permit me to have a normal family. As my mother said, photography is like the opium to me. I cannot afford to have a family. If I marry, I shall only ruin the poor woman's life." Li did not even consider the

prospect of a new relationship, "I don't want to hurt anybody. I lead the life of a savage or barbarian, and I am better off single."

### A Desert Heart

Li is used to drifting in the desert. What city dwellers regard as important go unheeded by Li. He neglects his appearance and doesn't even fasten his shoes when he goes out. Although he has lived in Urumqi for many decades, he does not know his way around restaurants and shops.

Once his car banged into another vehicle in the parking lot because of negligence. He waited two hours for the owner to turn up, and Li gave him 200 yuan in compensation. He could have fled the scene as his friend suggested, since the damage was too minor to spot. But a man like Li would have none of it, "My heart will not be at peace."



3. Li Xueliang got an Outstanding Prize in 2001 from China Photography.
4. Li was nearly attacked by wolves when he photographed the deserted Junggar Basin, northern Xinjiang.

## Postscript

I learnt that Li Xueliang won a gold medal in a competition among professional photographers, and he was regarded as the best out of the top ten photographers. Not long later, he received another bronze medal in the 20th National Photography Exhibition.

I called him up to express my congratulations, but he was on his way to roam across the Xinjiang desert. When I finally nailed him down, he was yet again to leave soon to Taiwan for an exhibition. Driven by a burning passion for photography, Li would forever immersed himself into the world of films and photographs.



# BITS AND PIECES OF SHANXI



The Taihang Mountains straddle the Shanxi Plateau (west) and the Hebei Plain (east), and they stretch south to the banks of the Yellow River (Henan Province). They vary in height from 1,000 to 2,000 m above sea level.

Details of the tourist attractions on the south side of the Taihang Mountains are covered in this issue's feature story (see page 14 - 47). Here are some of the highlights on the west side, Shanxi Province.



Shanxi, literally meaning west of the mountains, was named for its location — west of the Taihang Mountains. The province is demarcated by mountains, the Taihang Mountains in the east, the Luliang Mountains in the west, the Hengshan and Wutai mountains in the north, the Zhongtiao Mountains in the south, and the Taiyue Mountains in the centre. The crisscrossing rugged ranges of mountains are splendid and imposing.

Occupying 156,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Shanxi Province is situated on a loess plateau and it is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization. Most of this area stands 1,000 m above sea level, and hilly land accounts for 70 percent. The population of the province is nearing 30 million.

During the Western Zhou Dynasty (1100 - 711 BC), the state of Qin was founded in the southwest along the Fenhe River. It quickly developed politically, economically and culturally into a regional centre. During the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD), Shanxi was a buffer state between the nomadic people of the north and west, and the peasants who had settled in the fertile plains of what are today the Hebei and Henan provinces. The political status of the province varied according to the strength of the central government. From the end of the Han Dynasty until the reunion of the empire under the Sui Dynasty in 581, Shanxi was the seat of short-lived dynasties. Buddhism flourished in this province during the Northern Wei Dynasty, Datong, originated at this time.

## GETTING THERE

**By Air:** Taiyuan Shanxi Airport has 43 international and domestic airlines that are opened to travellers. Apart from weekly scheduled flights to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and other places, there is an international flight to Hong Kong.

**By Land:** Shanxi's transportation relies highly on railways. The railway network connects Shijiazhuang and Taiyuan; Beijing and Yuanping; Beijing and Baotou; Datong and Menyuan; Taiyuan and Jiaozuo. The province has completed seven double-track electric railways extending to coastal ports such as Qinhuangdao, Qingdao, Yantai and Lianyungang.

## ACCOMMODATION

Name	Star	Address	Tel (0351)
Shanxi Grand Hotel	★★★★	5 South Xinjian Road, Taiyuan	404 3901
Shanxi Yingze Hotel	★★★★	189 Yingze Street, Taiyuan	404 3211
Bingzhou Hotel	★★★	118 Yingze Street, Taiyuan	404 2111
Yejian Hotel Taiyuan	★★	278 East Shengliqiao, North Street, Taiyuan	304 2311
Yingze Hotel Taiyuan	★★	51 Yingze Street, Taiyuan	404 3211
Shanxi Sports Guest House	★	9 Sports Road, Dayingpan, Taiyuan	707 2357

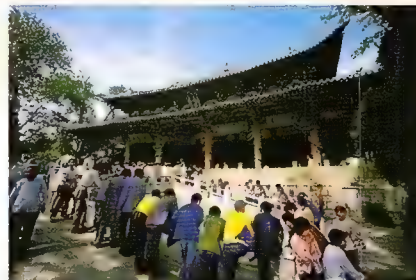


# MAIN ATTRACTIONS

## 1. Taiyuan

The capital of Shanxi, lies on the Fenhe River in the heart of the province and in the northern part of the fruitful Taiyuan Basin. The city, with a population of more than 2.2 million, is one of the important industrial centres in China.

Taiyuan has always been a centre of interest due to its mineral wealth, agricultural conditions and strategic position. It was the entryway to the Shanxi plateaus, a favorite target of the northern tribes and an advantageous starting point for an occupation of the empire. Thus, Taiyuan was the scene of political and martial conflicts again and again.



## 2. The Jinci Ancestral Temple

Lying in 25 km southwest of Taiyuan, it was built in the Northern Wei Dynasty and, after several renovations, gradually became a well-known historical site. The Hall of the Holy Mother inside the temple contains 43 Song Dynasty painted sculptures, vividly and exquisitely carved.



## 3. The Yungang Grottos

They are located at Datong. There are 53 grottos and 1,100 niches, with about 51,000 statues. Many of the carvings combine traditional Chinese art forms with foreign influences to create a unique style that occupies an important position in the history of Chinese art.

## 4. The Longshan Shiku Caves

Some Daoist cave dwellings are located on Longshan mountain about 20 km southwest of Taiyuan. They were constructed by the Daoist monk

Song Defang at the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty and contain more than 40 well preserved sculptures. There are inscriptions from the Yuan era on the walls.

## 5. The Wooden Pagoda

It was built in Yingxian County in 1056. This wooden pagoda has nine stories with four inner stories not apparent from the outside and rises to a height of 67.13 m. It is both the oldest and the tallest wooden pagoda extant in China.



## 6. The Xuankong (dangling) Temple

It was built on the cliffs at Jinlong Pass with its 40 halls, towers and pavilions supported with beams inserted into the cliffs and connected by plant paths. The whole structure seems to dangle by a thread at the edge of an abyss.







# Readership Survey

*China Tourism* always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

**Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
<b>Legends of the Taihang Mountains</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sleigh Ride Through a Winter Wonderland</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Strange Ways in Shaanxi</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Right on Track: Chasing the Forestry Trains</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>A Nice Long Lunch</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Others:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
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## What do you like most about *China Tourism*?

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**Are you happy with the factual content of *China Tourism*?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

## What are your suggestions for improvement?

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It provides us with invaluable feedback which will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine for you.

\*Please mail this questionnaire to our office at 24/F, Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, or fax to (852) 2561 8196.



## Feature Story: Winter in Jiuzhaigou

For a long time, Jiuzhaigou (Nine-Village Valley) in Sichuan Province has been the "Holy Land" for tourists, especially for photographers. And a winter trip there has become a fad recently that brings people into a fairyland of ice and snow. People used to throng there in spring, summer and autumn, but few came in winter for pictures. Now they have discovered that Jiuzhaigou in winter is like a beauty who had always been colourfully dressed suddenly changed into a land of utter whiteness — looking all the more innocent and elegant.

In all the four seasons Jiuzhaigou is gorgeous, attracting many shutterbugs to kill innumerable films. Yet this "fairyland" believed by many as "being able to produce masterpieces even with a fool-proof camera" has put many experienced photographers at



### Culture: History of Royal Porcelain Art

Using cobalt as ornamental material can be traced back to the Warring States more than 2,000 years ago. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), cobalt was used to decorate Tang trio-colour ceramics. But in the early eighth century, the blue cobalt was very rare and precious. It was not until the Yuan Dynasty in the 13th century that the making of blue and white porcelain had attained surprising development. The products of this period were characterized by dense ornamental patterns and gaily blue. This art got further improved in the following two dynasties of Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911).



### Discoveries: A Visit to Saltpan Village in Hainan

Lying in a remote corner in northwestern Hainan Province, Danzhou was a noted place of exile in history. Offenders in officialdom would be sent to this place. Su Dongpo, the genius scholar of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), is a typical example of the kind.

Near the seashore of Danzhou, there is a small village seldom known by outsiders. About 1,200 years ago, a group of migrants from Putian, Fujian Province came and settled in this place. Making use of lava, they found out a unique way to produce salt. Hence is the name of the village — the Yantian (Saltpan) Village. To this day, over 40 households of salt workers continue to use the traditional method.

### Customs: Come Alive for New Year — Liping's Dong region

What better occasion than Chinese New Year to experience the hospitality and friendliness of the Dong people in Guizhou Province's Dong Region? Guests are clamoured for to attend lavish banquets and their attention fraught between the endless music, spirited dancing, bullfights and a plethora of exciting events.

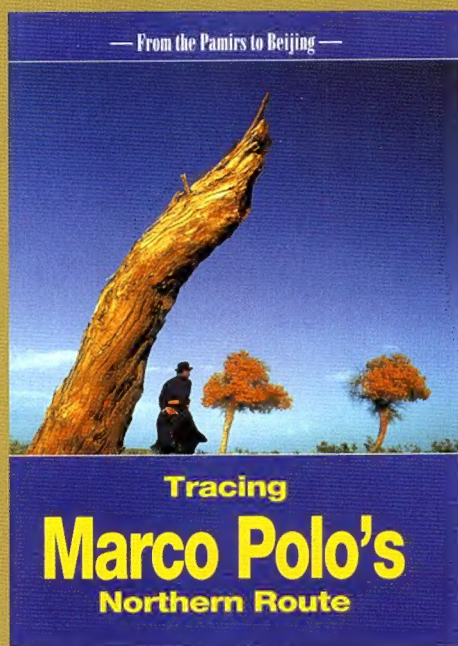
So in the holiday period of the 2003 Spring Festival, we ventured out to Liping County of Guizhou Province and spent the festival season with the Dong locals.





# Photographic & Practical Guides for Your China Tours

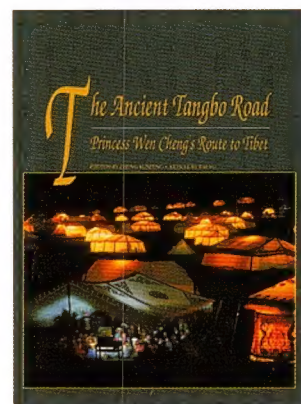
Before you set off for your perfect journey, you may have to prepare your itinerary carefully. Each of the following recommended readings offers different types of information which cater to our readers' various interests: exploring, photography, or tourist information. They will be great guides to your China tours.



## Tracing Marco Polo's Northern Route

A record of an 80-day journey in which our authors drive their jeep 12,000 km long through the northern regions of China following in the footsteps of Marco Polo's historic journey from the Pamir Highland to Beijing. In a medley of images and words, we present you with the fascinating scenery and various ways of life in Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet.

**HK\$156**



## The Ancient Tangbo Road

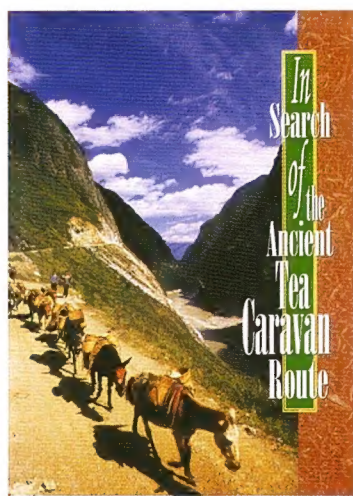
Covering four provinces including Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and the Tibet Autonomous Region, the ancient Tangbo Road was created on the map when Princess Wen Cheng was sent as a bride to Luoxie (present-day Lhasa) during the Tang Dynasty. Our photographers and writers, who have followed this arduous route, present you the graceful sights and unique ethnic customs on the way.

**HK\$192**

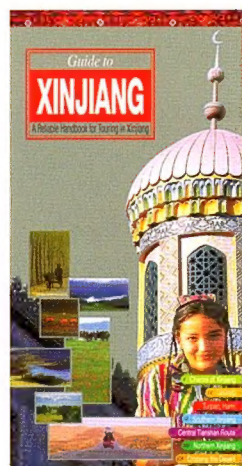
## In Search of the Ancient Tea Caravan Route

The ancient Tea Caravan Route can be traced back to 2,000 years ago, starting from Xishuangbanna at China's southwestern end, passing through boundless forests and valleys to the Sino-Indian, Nepalese and Sikkimese borders on Tibet, the "Roof of the World".

This book is not-to-be-missed by every daring adventurer.



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## Guide to Xinjiang

This book is especially designated for DIY travellers who desire to explore the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. There are detailed introduction to scenic spots in five main areas in Xinjiang including Ürümqi, Turpan, Southern and Northern Xinjiang, and Central Tianshan. Practical tourist information on accommodation, ticketing, shopping, local specialty, as well as travel tips are covered.

**HK\$96**





## Sacred Buddhist Lands

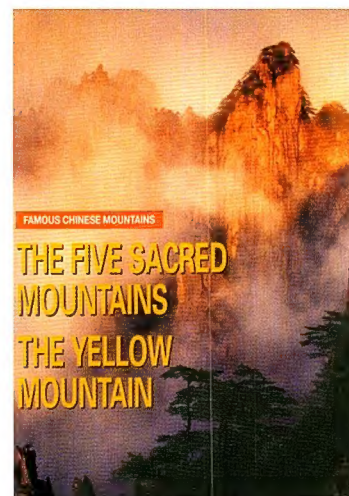
Buddhism in China is inevitably linked with some of the country's best known mountains. And going deep in the mountains and far away from civilization is an ideal place for retreat. Belonging to the four Bodhisattvas respectively, the four most famous Buddhist mountains — Wutai, Jiu Hua, Putuo and Emei — are nestled with numerous monasteries and nunneries which have been worshipped by pilgrims for thousands of years. Tourists to these places will totally be soaked in "Kingdoms of Buddhism".

**HK\$156**

## The Five Sacred Mountains The Yellow Mountain

Located in five provinces in China, every of the Five Sacred Mountains — Taishan, Hengshan, Songshan, Hengshan and Huashan — has its magnificent natural and cultural landscapes. Besides, Huangshan (Yellow Mountain), is also famous for its spectacular rocks, pine trees, and sea of clouds. It will be a great enjoyment in reading both the detailed text and remarkable images by our experienced photographers as recorded in this book.

**HK\$156**



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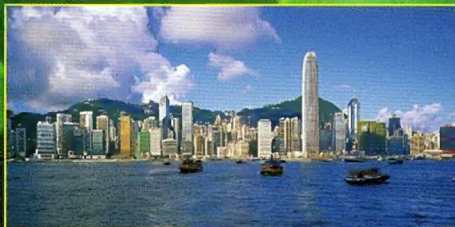
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